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Clementine

with Mabel Cobb

from her father

Charles Noble

Noble Castle

Dec. 3. 1935

IN WHIG SOCIETY

1775—1818







VISCOUNTESS MELBOURNE

FROM THE PICTURE IN THE POSSESSION OF HER GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON  
THE EARL OF ARRAN, P.C.K.P.



# IN WHIG SOCIETY

1775—1818

COMPILED FROM THE HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED  
CORRESPONDENCE OF ELIZABETH, VISCOUNTESS  
MELBOURNE, AND EMILY LAMB, COUNTESS  
COWPER, AFTERWARDS VISCOUNTESS PALMERSTON

BY

MABELL, COUNTESS OF AIRLIE

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TO  
MY DAUGHTER KITTY





## INTRODUCTION

IN giving some of the letters of my great-great-grandmother to the world, I have been actuated by a desire that they may perhaps serve some useful purpose in drawing a parallel between the condition of England during and after the Napoleonic Wars and the England of the present time.

They may also, I hope, reawaken interest in one who exercised a great influence over the society of her time. The letters have never been published before.

The habit of the letter-writers of that time was only to date their letters by the day of the week, so that the stamped date on the envelope has sometimes been the only clue to the month and year. The full stop seems to have been the only one known, the other stops being superseded by dashes, as if the writers paused to take breath.

The modern system of punctuation has, therefore, been introduced to a certain extent for the convenience of the reader. The writers abbreviated where they could because of the length of their letters, and when names are only given

under an initial the full name has in most cases been supplied.

I have to thank Mrs. Laing for sorting the letters, and Mr. Mainwaring, of the London Library, for helping me with the notes. My thanks are also due to Lord Ilchester for giving me copies of some of Lady Melbourne's letters to Lady Holland; and to Mr. Henry Cavendish for aiding me to disentangle a difficult question. There are but few interesting letters from Lady Cowper; but in later life her correspondence with her brother, Sir Frederick Lamb, afterwards Lord Beauvale, who succeeded his brother, Viscount Melbourne, in the title and estates in 1848, would form a volume in itself.

AIRLIE CASTLE,

ALYTH.

*August 1921.*

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## FOREWORD

DURING the last few years many memoirs and letters written by those women who played such notable parts in the political and social world of the latter end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century have been published. Lady Bessborough, Lady Holland, Lady Shelley, Lady Sarah Napier, Princess Lieven and Lady Granville have become our familiar friends through the medium of their brilliant correspondence. Yet two of the greatest women in the political society of their day are unknown to us, except through the remarks of their contemporaries, though their joint lives covered just over a century from the year 1752 to 1869. The letters of these two, Elizabeth Viscountess Melbourne, the mother, and Emily Lamb, Countess Cowper (later Viscountess Palmerston), the daughter, may be of some interest, not only because they give further light on the knowledge we already possess of that epoch, but also because they illustrate the vivid personalities of those who wrote them.

The epoch may be said to have closed with the Victorian Era, though it may also be said that it received the shrewd blow which eventually ended it with the passing of the Reform Bill.

Lady Melbourne, who was born in 1752 and died in 1818, was the mother of William, 2nd Viscount Melbourne, Whig Prime Minister from 1835 to 1837 and from 1837 to 1841. He is best known as the guardian and mentor of the girlhood of Queen Victoria.

His picture has been drawn for us in the contemporary record of the Queen's own faithfully kept diaries. He was then, as a present-day writer aptly calls him, "an autumn rose." He himself told the Queen what his mother had done for him. In the pages of Torrens' *Life of Melbourne*<sup>1</sup> we get a sinister sketch of her influence and personality, but the author gives us no self-revealing correspondence to enable us to form our own opinion of her character. She devoted her talents to the education and position of her greatly beloved son. Her very failings she used to turn to his advantage. He never satisfied her while she lived, but as the years sped by, in the autumn of his life, he became what she intended him to be. She was the Egeria of more than one great man, and her letters reveal the secret of her influence over them. Not only to William her second son, but also to Emily her elder

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Viscount Melbourne*, by William McCullagh Torrens, 1878.

daughter, Lady Melbourne transmitted her amazing talents, and when Emily, late in life, after the death of her first husband, became the wife of Lord Palmerston, Prime Minister of England for nearly nine years, she occupied a unique position in the political life of her day.

While Lady Melbourne's letters explain her domination, we cannot see in Lady Cowper's interminable and frequent communications much trace of the political talents which characterized her in later life. Like William she developed late, and her mother never saw the complete success of her work for her daughter.

There is a distinct difference in the style of the mother and daughter. The letters from Lady Melbourne might almost be written by a man—they display the calm good sense for which she was praised by her contemporaries, and are forcible rather than lively. The letters the daughter writes after her marriage with Lord Cowper are full of that fun and mischief which made her brother Frederick call her "that little devil Emily." Later, as Lady Palmerston, her letters are more restrained, but they remain distinctly a woman's letters. And in the lives of the two women there is also this difference. Lady Melbourne married a man who was unworthy of her, and could never have hoped for much happiness, but Lord Cowper was a man looked up to and beloved by many. Emily Lamb had before her the prospect of perfect happiness, and

realized it, as a letter written to her mother while on her honeymoon shows. But it was said of Lady Melbourne by those who knew her, that she could not see a happy marriage without trying to destroy its harmony.

One has to remember the days in which these two women lived. There was a curious completeness in their lives and those of their class. Looking back to that age, they and their friends seem like the inhabitants of some great Castle, secure in their impregnable position against the storms of the outside world, although they were beating around them. The members of that society were cultured and brilliant; their standards were classic both in literature and art. They loved to collect around them the treasures of ancient Europe. They read regularly and widely; their literary companions were the classics, and the men quoted Greek and Latin as easily as the schoolboy of to-day talks the slang of the moment. Their standard of good-breeding was stern, a very bed of Procrustes, and admitted of no alteration. The Whigs went so far as to invent their own pronunciation of common words, and talked of "chaney" for china; "Haryot" for Harriet; "yallar" for yellow; and sent to the "chimist" for their medicine. Frances Viscountess Jocelyn, Lady Cowper's daughter, who lived until 1880, urged her granddaughters to speak of "cow-cumber" as so much more suitable than cucumber.



It was a very different age to ours. So closely welded a community made its own social laws. Good-breeding demanded that outward conventions should not be violated, but asked few questions as to what went on beneath the surface. Scandals were glossed over by the decent acquiescence of wife or husband. Nearly every man drank too much, but so long as he "carried his wine like a gentleman" no one saw any reason to complain, and he himself made complete and frequent atonement by disabling fits of the gout. Anything shocking or violent was an offence in itself, and it is easy to conceive the horror which the open scandal of Lady Caroline Lamb's intrigue with Byron must have inspired in Lady Melbourne; not so much on account of its immorality as of its publicity.

Every gentleman in those days thought it right to appear to be in the enjoyment of a grand leisure, even though he worked very hard behind the scenes,<sup>1</sup> and it was considered the most important of a woman's accomplishments that she should possess sufficient knowledge of the world and *savoir-faire* to skate lightly over a difficult situation. The art of conversation was considered of great importance, and the young learned it through mixing with their elders.

There was much likeness between the English society of this age and their contemporaries of

<sup>1</sup> The 5th Duke of Devonshire said of his cousin Henry Cavendish, the scientist, "He is not a gentleman—he works."

the *ancien régime* in France ; but in reading the memoirs of the day one is struck by the fact that, contrary to the French practice, the English landowners lived constantly on their estates and took a benevolent, though perhaps uneducated, interest in their tenants. The passing of the Reform Bill probably saved the English from the fate of the French aristocracy.

With the death of Lady Palmerston in 1869, practically the last survivor of that brilliant period through which she and her mother had lived passed away.

## CHAPTER I

### LADY MELBOURNE

ELIZABETH, VISCOUNTESS MELBOURNE was born in 1752, the eldest daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke, 5th Baronet of Halnaby, in the county of York, and his wife Elizabeth, who was a daughter of Robert, 2nd Earl of Holderness.

The family of Milbanke was an old one, and an ancestor of the 1st Baronet, Ralph Milbanke, was the hereditary cupbearer of Queen Mary of Scotland.

Lady Melbourne was born at a time when the position of the House of Brunswick was insecure in England—not long after the Highland rising in favour of Prince Charles Stuart; before the American War of Independence and the French Revolution; before William Pitt, the great Commoner, had taken his place among the rising statesmen of the day; and about the time that the hard fate of the young Queen of Hungary, Maria Theresa, had plunged Europe into war.

She died three years after the Battle of Waterloo, when the Army of Occupation had been withdrawn from France and Europe was delivered from the nightmare of Napoleon's domination.

Her pictures show her to have been a singularly beautiful woman. Her chiselled features, her brilliant complexion and large blue eyes, with a glint of humour in them, still remain to us on the canvases of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Cosway. In that age of powder she wore her bright brown hair untouched, and in nearly all her pictures she wears a narrow thread of black velvet round her throat. The rumour of the day gave a sinister interpretation to this adornment. As she grew older, she became rather large in her person, but this does not seem to have impaired her charms.

This beautiful creature was married at the age of seventeen to Sir Peniston Lamb, a man who was principally known by the distinguished place he occupied in the annals of pleasure, in the *Memoirs* of Mrs. Bellamy or Mrs. Baddeley, the sirens and courtesans of a former age. She had little prospect of a happy married life before her ; but she was not only a beautiful woman ; she was also possessed of a commanding intelligence and personality, and it is written that “ the rise of her family was due to her brilliant qualities.”

Her husband's father had made a fortune and received a baronetcy. His wealth was not amassed without suspicion. He was the confidential adviser of Lord Salisbury and Lord Egremont, and the old Marchioness of Salisbury, widow of the 1st Marquess, used to say that the rise of the Lamb family was from the plunder of

the Earls of Salisbury.<sup>1</sup> His son constructed an immense mansion in Piccadilly, where now stands the Albany. As he did not care to call it after his own name he consulted George Selwyn on the subject. "Call it House Lamb, my dear Peniston," replied the wit. When he was made Lord Melbourne in 1770 he called it Melbourne House.

He took his title from Melbourne, an estate in the county of Derby, bought by his father from the Cokes, to whom he had been attorney. The mansion on the Melbourne property is not very large; the gardens are magnificent. They were laid out by Le Notre, designer of the famous gardens at Versailles, and it is remarkable that those at Wrest Park, in Bedfordshire, which came later into the Cowper family should have been laid out by the same hand. Broomfield Hall, near Welwyn, in the county of Hertford, was also bought by the Lambs from the representatives of Sir Thomas Winnington in 1746.

Sir Matthew Lamb had amassed money for his son: Sir Peniston was a spendthrift as well as a libertine. He squandered the immense fortune he received from his father. Without much zeal for politics, he sat in the House of Commons as Member for Ludgershall from 1768 to 1784, dumbly following Lord North. He was created an Irish Baron in 1770 as Lord Melbourne of Kilmore, an Irish Viscount in 1781, and an

<sup>1</sup> *Burke's Peerage.*



English peer in 1815. He was also a Lord of the Bedchamber to George IV in 1784.

Lord North had put forward the name of Sir Peniston Lamb as a worthy recipient of a peerage. He was young, rich, with a charming wife. He entertained largely, and he would be a useful person to attach to the Throne. An Irish peerage retained him in the House of Commons, and "it constituted an intervening grade of social rank, which, as the experience of George II's reign had shown, led the holder frequently to look for Imperial ennoblement."<sup>1</sup> The later honours he received were chiefly owing to the careful diplomacy of his beautiful wife.

Even when no longer in her first youth, Lady Melbourne became the object for a time of the easily transferable affections of George IV, then Prince of Wales, and Wraxall, who evidently admired her very much, says :

"She might well challenge such a preference. A commanding figure exceeding the middle height, full of grace and dignity, an animated countenance, intelligent features, captivating manners and conversation; all these and many other attractions, enhanced by coquetry, met in Lady Melbourne."<sup>2</sup>

When she is mentioned by her contemporaries

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Melbourne*, by Torrens, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Wraxall's *Historical Memoirs of My Own Time*.



there is sometimes a little ridicule mixed with the words of praise necessary for one so much considered in the highest circles. This is apparent in Wraxall's account of the trouble she took when the Prince of Wales was a gentleman Commoner at Eton at the same time as her sons. She would pay them a weekly visit, giving a great dinner to which the Prince was always invited. On one occasion Wraxall speaks of her dancing with him after dinner to his great delight, though rather in a "cowlike stile" (*sic*).

Horace Walpole describes her in the prime of her beauty in 1778 :

"On Tuesday I supped after the Opera at Mrs. Meynel's, with a most fashionable company, which take notice I seldom do now, as I certainly am not of the age to mix often with young people. Lady Melbourne was standing before the fire and adjusting her feathers in the glass ; says she, ' Lord, they say the stocks will blow up : that will be very comical.' " <sup>1</sup>

Lady Bessborough, in her private correspondence, calls her "The Thorn." Lady Holland, in 1793, speaks of her in her journal, saying :

"Our parties at Devonshire House were

<sup>1</sup> *H. Walpole's Letters*, ed. Cunningham, vii, 63. The meaning of the remark from this lady of fashion seems obscure ; but it was the mode among the fine ladies of the day to dabble in the finance of the City, partly because it was so much connected with the politics of the world in which they took their part. So they affected a strange Stock Exchange jargon which they used on all occasions.

delightfully pleasant. Lady Melbourne is uncommonly sensible and amusing, though she often put me in mind of Madame de Merteuil in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Bedford is attached to her: he is almost brutal by the roughness of his manners."

But these strictures are unusual, and those who disliked her are in the minority. Byron in his diary says she was the best friend he ever had, and the cleverest of women, and that he "writes with most pleasure to her, for her answers are so sensible and so tactique." Her son William's verdict on her long after was—"My Mother was a most remarkable woman, not merely clever and engaging, but the most sagacious woman I ever knew. She kept me straight as long as she lived."

The impression revealed by her contemporaries is that her personality excited a sort of fear. Her care for appearances and her common sense enabled her to preserve an outwardly unassailable propriety in an age when an easy morality characterized good society. She was very beautiful and very brilliant. Having but little prospect of domestic happiness, she turned the brain of a

<sup>1</sup> "D'abord Mdm. de Merteuil en effet très estimable n'a peut être d'autres défauts que trop de confiance en ses forces. C'est un guide adroit qui se plaît à conduire un char entre les rochers et les précipices et que le succès seul justifie ; il est juste de la louer, il serait imprudent de la suivre. Elle même en convieut et s'en accuse. A mesure qu'elle a vue d'avantages ses principes sont devenues plus sévères."—*Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

man to secure the worldly position for her family which a father should have achieved for them.

Melbourne House in Piccadilly was a centre of society. About 1790 the Duke of York, who was a constant visitor there, complained to his hostess that he was tired of Whitehall, and would prefer a residence like Melbourne House. She, nothing loth to oblige such an admirer, persuaded her husband to lend his countenance to the transaction, and the King having given his consent, the exchange was concluded.

In the brilliant society of Melbourne House, where all that was best in brains, politics, art, and fashion constantly gathered, Lord Byron became the friend of Lady Melbourne, and she his confidante. Here, later on, he became the hero of her daughter-in-law's dreams. Lady Melbourne received Lord Byron on terms of the utmost familiarity, rare with her: one of her sayings was that few men could be trusted with other people's secrets, and no woman with her own. This curious intimacy must have aggravated an already difficult position, for Lady Melbourne seems to have cared but little for the wives of her sons, and indeed her son Frederick pities her in one of his letters for the daughters-in-law his brothers had given her.

While reading Lady Melbourne's correspondence with her niece Annabella, with reference to the

latter's marriage with Byron, one is irresistibly reminded of Mme. de Merteuil. It may be that in her anxiety to put an end to the scandal in her favourite son William's household, she mercilessly sacrificed an Iphigenia on the altar of her own family happiness. It is true that Byron had consulted Lady Melbourne on the choice of a wife, but who that reads Annabella's list of the qualities she requires in a husband could have given her to him as a wife?

Peniston, Lady Melbourne's eldest son, was born the year after her marriage in 1770. His portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds shows him to have been wonderfully handsome in a rather effeminate style. Very like his father, he was idolized by this parent. He was gentle and affectionate, and accepted the political career mapped out for him. His father in 1793 gave up his seat at Newport in his favour, and in 1802 he was returned for Hertfordshire, but fell a victim to consumption, and died on January 24, 1805.

Peniston, like his brothers William and George, was a good amateur actor, and theatricals were among the diversions of Melbourne House, which had become "one of the gayest and most brilliant centres of fashion." The Prince of Wales, the Duke of Bedford, and Lord Egremont, "who had earliest won and latest held Lady Melbourne's confidence and regard,"<sup>1</sup> were constantly under its roof.

<sup>1</sup> Torrens.

William, Lady Melbourne's second son, born long after Peniston in 1779, whose education was the chief care and preoccupation of her life, now became the heir to the title, and his mother devoted her great abilities to make him a power in the country, though she never succeeded during her life time in moulding him quite as she wished.

Her third son, Frederick, was born on April 17, 1782 ; her fourth son, George, in 1784. Emily, or Amelia Mary, Lady Melbourne's elder daughter, was born in 1787.

In 1789 her younger daughter, Harriet Anne, was born, but died in 1803. Her only record is the little humorous merry face which looks at us out of Lawrence's canvas, laughing and bewildered by the loss of her cap, which her sister, "that little devil Emily," has pulled off in play ; and one letter to her brother George, preserved among his papers. It is just such a letter as a little sister might write now to her brother. George was then at Eton, and "Haryot" writes that "Papa hears you go to school in boats," so the floods were evidently out. Also she gives news of the dogs, how "Roy has got three beautiful puppies, which are much bigger than Nelly," and begs him "to write to me soon and tell me how long it is to the holidays."

It is interesting also to hear from her that "William" (who was probably then 17) "judged



of us—Henry,<sup>1</sup> Emily, and me—which knew most and what we knew. He gave us a little bit of cart [*sic*] with it writ upon it.” She also describes how William tells her that he goes to the play to see Mrs. Stephen Kemble.<sup>2</sup> The child quotes William, who says :

“ A son of Mrs. Siddons plays all the great characters. His face is more pale, his eyes more black, his voice more foggy, and his manners more constrained than Kemble’s. If he did not add to all these unlucky similarities—he is a decided imitation of him in all he says or does—he might make a tolerable actor.”

Years after, Harriet’s brother Frederick alluded to the cause of her death in a letter to his sister Emily. Consumption took Harriet, as it was destined to take Peniston two years later. The experts of the present day may smile, but it is a fact that this illness decimated Lady Melbourne’s descendants to the third generation.

In 1775 a new star shone on London Society—Georgiana Spencer, the eldest daughter of the 1st Earl Spencer and his wife Margaret Poyntz,

<sup>1</sup> We do not know who “ Henry ” was ; probably one of the many childish companions of the Lamb children who played among the leafy glades of Broomfield.

<sup>2</sup> She was Elizabeth Gatehall, who was then in her prime, about 33 years old, and had married Stephen Kemble, the son of Roger Kemble, the great actor and brother of Mrs. Siddons.



married to the 5th Duke of Devonshire at the age of 17.

Devonshire House, which had not known a mistress since the death of the last Duchess in 1754, at once became the centre of a political circle, active because most of its members were young, important because their rank was high and the influence they exerted over the fortunes of the Whig Party far-reaching. The new Duchess was young and beautiful, and was what in modern parlance is called "a personality."

Lady Melbourne was older by some years than this brilliant schoolgirl who was entering on life, and Melbourne House was already established as the great Whig centre in London Society.

A more ordinary woman would have feared a rival in the new Duchess. Instead, Lady Melbourne, with the tact and judgment so peculiarly her own, used every charm she possessed to cherish and strengthen the deep affection for herself which she had inspired in Georgiana, and at once took up her favourite rôle of confidante and guide.

There is a letter from Georgiana docketed 1775, but which would appear from the contents to be of later date, which shows that Lady Melbourne could scold as well as cajole the impulsive girl. The Duchess called her "Themire," by which name she always addressed her, and writes :

"I am dead asleep, my D[ea]r D[ea]r Love,

but Melbourne must have a line to take to you. Do not think because I am idle that I do not love you. Je t'aime, je t'adore, ma chère, finira qu'avec ma vie [*sic*]. Pray write to me, tell me that you love me & are not angry with me. I have a thousand things to say you, mais le moyen sans te voir ? [*sic*]. Why don't you come up ? I cannot leave London this week, but I hope to get a few days with you. My brats are pretty well. Bless you."

(Endorsed 1775.)

Charles Grey, handsome, distinguished, a rising statesman, supposed to hold violent and revolutionary views in his youth, was greatly attracted by the Duchess. He was the son of a distinguished General, Sir Charles Grey, later Viscount Howick and Earl Grey. The most eminent men of the Whig Party were to be met at the feet of one or other of their divinities both at Devonshire and Melbourne House. The young Duchess, like most of the ardent spirits of the day, was in love with liberty, and looked on Charles James Fox, the Whig Minister, as the champion of the cause. It has been said that it was an age of cards and candlelight. We also know it was an age of deep potations ; the fashion of the day was to dine early, go to the opera or the playhouse, and return to a late supper, where the wits and the statesmen, fresh from the House of Commons debates on the doctrines of liberty, sat with the most beautiful women of their day, until the candles guttered and bent in the gilded candelabra

and the sedan chairs with their weary chairmen and footmen in the courtyard showed tawdry in the light of dawn. Who can wonder that the doctrines of liberty were not limited to political ends?

Charles Grey, who after his marriage in 1794 became almost a byword for domestic felicity, fell completely under the spell of the young Duchess of Devonshire. His affection was returned, and their confidante was Lady Melbourne. In 1791 Lady Melbourne received the following letter dated "Fallodon, Decr. 20":

FALLODON, *Decr. 20.*

DEAR LADY MELBOURNE,

I could almost find it in my heart to be very angry with you for the fright you have given me, but my happiness in being relieved from it will not allow me. I cannot express to you the misery I have suffered for the last three days. Upon reading your letter over again, I found a very exact date of the day on which you wrote it, & a little Postscript telling me that it would enable me to calculate the arrival of the parcel with certainty. This I thought you had considered as sufficient without writing a second letter, & as the time of the arrival of the parcel corresponded exactly with the day on which you said you were to go to Town I thought there was no longer any chance. I waited, however, but Sunday's Post bringing me no letter I then gave it quite up. Last night your letter arrived and made me quite happy, the more so as it was the more unexpected. The parcel, however, is not yet come, tho' it ought to have been here at the same

time as your letter. I have, however, no fears for its safety, as I never knew anything lost in the Mail Coach. The worst of it is I had written to her yesterday, having had a letter the night before, desiring me to direct to Aix, as it was very material in case the letter had miscarried that I should hear from her as soon as possible. I am in hopes, however, that I shall be able to stop the letter, as I sent it to a Person in Town to put into the Post, which he may not have done before a letter I shall write today reaches him, as I believe the foreign Post does not go from London till Friday. At all events I shall write today to her again, & if I am in luck she may open the letter meant to relieve her anxiety first, or at least it will follow immediately.

I can bear any scolding from you just now under the joy of this unexpected relief. But you ought to be a little mild from the example of good nature that I set you, in not scolding you for being so dilatory. In the letters I got from Roanne and Lyons on Saturday she says she hopes I have got the parcel, as it was of the greatest consequence that I should have it immediately. So you must justify me to her, & make your own peace. Why did you not send me some of her letters if you felt inclined to do so? Indeed, I never mean to plague her, but I believe I am born to be a plague to every body. I write in a great hurry and am going to Alnwick to enquire about the parcel, which will give me an opportunity of putting this into the Post to-day, which I should not otherwise have had. God bless you.

Yours sincerely,  
C. GREY.

It is necessary in endeavouring to picture Lady Melbourne's many-sided character to emphasize not only her love for her own relations, for whom she seems to have been ready to take infinite trouble, but also her genius for business. Her younger brother John, who had been Architect and Contractor of His Majesty's Works, was lying ill of the illness with which he died in 1800. His son, afterwards Sir John Milbanke, 7th Baronet, had married before this Eleanor, daughter of Julius Hering. The couple were in debt, and Lady Melbourne took upon herself to endeavour to extricate them in a letter so clear and so businesslike that it is worth quoting in full. Indeed, in every capacity in which Lady Melbourne appeared she seems to have succeeded. Not one of her letters ever displays anything but the soundest principles and amazing good sense.

*From Lady Melbourne to unknown*

SIR,

I have to apologise for the liberty I take in addressing you, but as the comfort of a near Relation of Yours is so much concerned I hope I need make no further excuses, & shall only observe that the bad state of my Brother Mr. John Milbanke's health, which renders him unable to attend to any business, is the reason of my interfering upon a subject which would have come more properly from him—I am afraid my nephew Capn. Milbanke has not been so



explicit as he ought respecting his affairs to you Sir, & to Mrs. Milbanke's other Relations, for if he had I feel convinced you would have seen the necessity of making some provision for the pay[men]t of his debts—& would have advised him accordingly—or had his Relations known that his Marriage was to have taken place so soon some arrangement of that sort would have been proposed by them, for tho they were unacquainted with the extent of his debts, yet we knew it was impossible he should not have some, from the very small income his Father could give him, & from his situation in the profession which must lead him into great expenses. At the same time I must say that I cannot accuse him of any great extravagance, but he seems to have fall'n into bad Hands, & of course to have obtained money on very exorbitant terms, & I must own that considering all these circumstances I am surprised his debts do not amount to a larger sum. His conduct in not explaining his situation more fully can only be attributed to the embarassment a Young Man naturally feels in confessing his imprudences, as he might have settled his affairs with more facility previous to his Marriage than he can now. I have no doubt in my own Mind that were he once clear of debt, his future conduct would be prudent, & that having suffered so much distress and difficulty, a lesson would be imprinted, which he could not easily forget. It is under this conviction that I venture to apply to you—as I think it may be in your power to assist him materially & I do not see how he can in any other way extricate himself even from his present difficultys which press upon him daily & which distress him the more as they must involve Mrs.



Milbanke's happiness by wounding her feelings— & from her amiable Character, I feel highly interested in her welfare and most sincerely hope they may be happy. From a variety of causes, relating to Family affairs which it would at present be unnecessary & tedious to enumerate, but which I have not the least objection to relate to you, if I have the honor of seeing you, my Br[other] has it not in his power to assist him which he certainly would wish to do if he could—for if he has appear'd averse to his marriage it has not been from the least want of affection or from any other reason, but from a consciousness of his inability to make his situation comfortable. I understand you are Trustee for Mrs. Milbanke & that her fortune of £2,000 is settled upon her. If you would consent to call in a Thousand p[oun]ds of it, & it could be stated in what time it might be raised I should hope that sum might be borrowed on reasonable terms till the time of payt., & as he has 500 pd. at his Father's death which is not settled, & secured to him by his Mother's will: and another 500 secured also—by his Father—these two sums might be settled upon Mrs. Milbanke in lieu of 1,000 of her fortune which would be paid to him—This would I think relieve him effectually, and you must be sensible that nothing except being clear of debt can enable Mrs. M[ilbanke] & him to live upon their present small income and that any calls for Money to pay off old Debts must, not only be of the greatest present distress, but also of the least consequences ultimately.

My anxiety for my nephew and my wish to explain his situation clearly & fully to you, are my reasons for having presumed to trouble you

with so long a letter, which I trust you will have the goodness to forgive.

I am,

Sir,

Your most obed.

& most Humble Sert.

ELIZ: MELBOURNE.

WHITEHALL.

Charles Grey, an impetuous lover of the theories of liberty of Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and the Encyclopedists, had found that when these theories were put into practice, a state of unparalleled licence was the result. Many of the younger votaries of Liberty, when they saw the French Revolution, paused to reconsider their opinions. Grey when he wrote to Mrs. Ord after the Execution of the King of France in 1793, says, "bad as I am thought I cannot express the horror I feel at the atrocity," and as a post-script adds—"War is certain. God grant we may not all lament the consequence of it."

Among Grey's friends was George Canning. The fearful events which marked the Revolution in France were reaching a summit of unparalleled horror. Those who loved liberty in this country had welcomed the beginning of Revolution in France, but, as Mme. Roland said, the crimes which were committed in the name of liberty were rapidly alienating those champions of the struggle which was taking place on the other side of the Channel

Canning, who had taken up the law as a profession, purposed to enter politics. He was already a friend of those habitués of Devonshire House and of Melbourne House who are spoken of in the letters of the period. Lords Morpeth<sup>1</sup> and Boringdon<sup>2</sup> were his chief friends, and to the latter he wrote from the Temple on December 13, 1792, a letter so like in sentiment to the following found among her papers that his feelings on the subject were probably well known.

Canning was, like Grey, an intimate friend of Lady Melbourne. Her mature mind had at once rejected the violent views which both held, and either may have written the following letter in which he explains that he will not offend the principles of his hostess by airing the violence of his opinions should he be allowed as usual to come to her house.

“Whatever my principles may be you need not be afraid of my discussing them at your house. I know how ill it will be received and shall therefore avoid it however angry I may sometimes be at hearing unqualified abuse of Men whose talents and general principles I must admire, particularly when it comes from those who have neither talents nor principles but are guided in all their actions solely by selfishness. Ld. E[lgremont]’s

<sup>1</sup> Morpeth, the eldest son of the Earl of Carlisle, who in 1801 married Georgiana, the eldest daughter of Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, had espoused the cause of liberty with ardour.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Boringdon, afterwards created 1st Earl of Morley, married into the great Whig family of the Jerseys.

opinions do not alarm me ; I think his judgment generally good, but on this subject he has always been a croaker.

“How can you know me so little as to suppose any thing could induce me even to accept, much more to ask a favor of the present adminis[tratio]n. I wrote to Ld. O. to thank him for his offer of the Lieut[enan]cy, but to decline it at the same time, telling him I never would take it. I will never subject myself to the caprice of a K[ing], & I might be turned out for my political opinion as others have been. As to the Militia, I deferr’d giving him a positive answer till I see him. I should not have hesitated about accepting it if I had not been convinced that in every respect it would be disagreeable to me, & I could only be induced to do it from a conviction that in the present situation of affairs everybody ought to stand forward, particularly the young ones & those whose keeping back might be attributed to their want of ardour in the cause. I therefore remain still in doubt urged on the one hand by the wish to what I think I ought & on the other by the wish to avoid what would be in every respect a disagreeable situation.

“You mistake me in supposing I am violent in my political opinions. At some moments I feel great apprehensions as to the effects of any change—my inclinations lead me to the reformers, my aversions strengthen these inclinations. I see too with regret Men whom I always hoped would some day rescue the country from the arbitrary, the oppressive, the aristocratic Administration that now governs it, meanly playing a second part and being the dupes by being the Cats paw of the very set of men their principles

must make them detest (at least politically so). Seeing all this I cannot help wishing a speedy reform that will in some degree satisfy the minds of the people. I know the danger of any reform, but I cannot help looking on a present moderate one as the only means of preventing a very serious one soon. Opposition have lost their consequence. Whilst the people had them to look to they flatter'd themselves the hasty strides of the present admin[istratio]n towards encreasing the influence of the Crown would at least be checked if not stopp'd. They can no longer have that hope, for they see the Chiefs fighting Pitt's battles."



## CHAPTER II

### LADY MELBOURNE AND GEORGIANA DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE

WHEN we read the history of England in 1801, we might be reading the history of England to-day.

She was then, as now, victorious, but she was paying then, as now, the price of victory. The victory of Alexandria and our successes at Copenhagen and in Egypt were followed by the complete conquest of the latter country in September; but the condition of the country when Parliament opened in February 1801 was very serious. The King's Speech drew attention to the high prices and the scarcity of provisions, and urged remedial measures.

During the ensuing debate in the House of Lords, expedients the names of which sound to us at this date like old friends, were freely put forward, and we read of such well-known phrases as "increase of production" and the "abandonment of brewing" so that the barley might be used as food, though the ingenuous suggestion of Lord Suffolk is, happily, new to us. He deplored the necessity of keeping large numbers of Dragoons all over the country for the suppression of the



rioting caused by starvation and high prices. He urged that 10,000 Dragoons should be kept in one vast camp in the centre of England. From there they could proceed expeditiously to any centre of disaffection and tumult. But in the intervals between outbreaks of this sort, they could be employed in bringing fish from the coast to augment the food supply of a starving population. Lord Warwick enunciated the doctrine that it was the duty of the Government to find employment for the workman, and proposed works of public utility. In the House of Commons Sir Francis Burdett attributed the scarcity to underconsumption, because the taxation was so high that, before a man could purchase commodities, he must have his salary raised. Robson remarked in the same place that much had been said concerning the poor, but that "the middling classes were crushed out of existence by heavy taxation, which forced people to borrow from the banks to meet their taxes and their liabilities." The inflation of currency caused a fictitious prosperity, and enabled those who possessed corn to keep it out of the markets, thus emphasizing the scarcity.

In March Pitt resigned owing to the King's determined opposition to his measure for Roman Catholic Emancipation. Pitt had wished to include this measure in the Act of Union between England and Ireland, but as George III developed conscientious objections, and on the ground that

the King might go mad if his will was opposed, Pitt submitted and resigned. He was succeeded by the Speaker, Henry Addington, as Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Lord of the Treasury. Lords Granville, Spencer, and Cornwallis followed Pitt, as did Dundas, Windham, and Canning.

Addington's Ministry, which contained none of the great names, such as Pitt or Fox or Grenville or Grey, was not likely to be considered of much importance by Bonaparte, who now left the power of England entirely out of his calculations. Addington wished to strengthen his Ministry, and as he could not gain the support of Pitt's followers, began to make overtures to the Whigs. But there were personal divisions among the Whigs also at that moment. The inner circle of the party at that time was composed of Fox, Grenville, Lord Holland, and Francis Duke of Bedford. The outer circle contained Sheridan, Grey, and Erskine, but these were severally detached from the inner circle. Grey and Fox had always regarded Sheridan with suspicion and mistrusted his influence over the Prince of Wales.

Grey, who in his early and more violent years had belonged to a Society called "The Friends of the People," was present at a banquet of the Whig Club in January 1802, when Sheridan in a speech referred to "those persons who, thrown by accident in the outset of life into situations for which they are not fitted, become Friends of the People for a time, and afterwards, finding

their mistake, desert the cause." Grey received the attack with serenity, writing afterwards to his brother-in-law Whitbread that he "thinks Sheridan must have been drunk." Sheridan, the handsome Irish dramatist and politician, the friend of the Prince Regent, was only too well known for such an accusation to cause astonishment, and a contemporary account, while not denying it categorically, points out that it was rather early in the evening for Sheridan to be drunk, as dinner was only just over. There were others who mistrusted those present at the dinner, chiefly George Tierney, who had persistently opposed Pitt and had attempted to prevent the Whig secession of 1798. He had always tried to separate Grey from the Whig Party, and was one of the "numerous politicians of middle class origin who the aristocratic Whigs used, but never regarded, as one of themselves."<sup>1</sup> Canning in the *Needy Knife Grinder* writes of Tierney under the satirical name of the "Friend of Humanity." Tierney's determination to make mischief was well known, and the Duchess of Devonshire, who was then at Hardwicke, wrote to Lady Melbourne in great anxiety lest Grey should take the attack to himself. Lady Holland, the divorced wife of Sir Godfrey Webster, now married to the 3rd Lord Holland, had, through virtue of her husband's position as a near relation of Charles James Fox, endeavoured to exert an influence on

<sup>1</sup> *Holland House Circle*, Lloyd Saunders, p. 151.

the Whig Party, but was handicapped by the fact that the great Whig ladies so far refused to visit her. This no doubt added to her enjoyment of any wounds she could inflict on their friends.

*From the Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Melbourne*

DEAREST LOVE,

I am as anxious as it is possible to be. I am convinc'd that in the first instance, no one considered the attack to affect Mr. Grey, but that it was a manœuvre of L[ad]y H[olland] & Tierney to make mischief & shelter the latter. I have a proof of this because L[ad]y Holland, when she wrote my Sister the acc[oun]t of the Speech, said it was very illnatur'd to Tierney. Now had not the other been an after thought she would have mention'd it then.

Hare<sup>1</sup> as far as he can judge thinks as I do. One good thing is that Mr. G[rey] has no thoughts of going to town & I have wrote him with Hare's approbation a conciliatory letter—and telling him what I could alone say perhaps to him—that I thought Tierney had a mind to draw him into the scrape by making him suppose that Sheridan had meant him. It could not be—Sheridan could not compare a man, who listen'd to overture to see if an arrangement could be made & a man, who pretending, as Tierney did, to belong to no party, chose not only to be of the Whig Club but to insinuate himself into their secrets & Councils, & in fact brought more abuse on them from his jacobin *allures* than any other—then leaves them for his own advantage & joins the

<sup>1</sup> James Hare, wit and politician and friend of Fox, 1749–1804.



D. of Portland whom he had represented as his Enemy & Oppresser.

That Mr. Grey, pleas'd with peace, beset by Relations & dazzled by the overtures Addington might make of repealing odious Acts, might examine, if there was not a chance of arrangement, I cannot blame or wonder at, especially as he was soon convinced there was not & went into the Country for an intention of staying perhaps the whole year. That Tierney or any one should rank him with a man who has join'd as T. has done & is probable [*sic*] only waiting for his election for a place is too bad.

The excuse of their writing to Sheridan perhaps was his indiscretion. They had indiscreet friends however, for I knew of the negotiation even in its infancy & this Mr. Grey knows (this however you must tell no-one, for by experience you know how jealous people are of being thought to confide in one). Why are Lauderdale & Loo angry with Sheridan—in short write for pity.

Direct to Hardwick near Mansfield. I have so much pain on my heart I am going to put on a blister.

I cannot read it over, excuse faults.

*To the Viscountess Melbourne, Whitehall, London*  
*From the Duchess of Devonshire*

MY DEAR LOVE,

I have done all I can, but I have found the Speech, & reading it again & with an idea that did not at first strike me—I do own I think it very bad & that a less susceptible person might have suppos'd *that Juggles & persons who had alterd their plans for destructive ones*, seem'd more

like addressing the Plural, than an individual such as Tierney. I am furious at it. If to listen to proposals of arrangement merely to see if on the grounds of peace something might not be done to restore Whig principles—& finding this in vain leaving London, can be call'd a juggle what was Sheridan's plan two years back?—& can this be applied in a more offensive manner than by classing such an independent Character as Mr. G[rey]'s with a self-interested time serving fellow as Tierney. Do not think I am giving way to my usual wrath (?) unconditionally. I allow that Tierney has great talents: that he has perseverance beyond most men—that he resolv'd to let no opportunity slip of shewing these talents to advantage, i.e., *selling himself to advantage*, & that he has done so. That ten years ago, had anybody said Tierney would have the place which I believe (tho not at liberty to say what it is) is destined to him, he would have been laugh'd at. But he knew his own powers of mind, & not only exerted them, but exerted them in a masterly manner. But I believe, as to principle, he has just as much now as he had at any period of his life, when he got chose of the Whig Club or in his first adherence or subsequent quarrel with the Duke of Portland. I think him an agreeable man, & I do not suppose him to be an ilnaturd man when self is out of the case—but is this man, when he has made a bargain anybody knew he would make, to be compar'd with my—[sic] never, never, never.

I have done how ever all I can, but I am myself furious with Sheridan.

*Stamped "Feb. 12. 1802," and "Bakewell."*



These political preoccupations had for Lady Melbourne a bitter sequel—doubly bitter because, before losing all, she had to witness the waning of her influence. Lady Holland has spoken of Francis, 5th Duke of Bedford as Lady Melbourne's admirer. He had from his earliest youth looked upon his vast estates and possessions as a great trust, and had spent his time as he grew older in an endeavour to improve the rural economy of his country. Believed by the world to be at the feet of Lady Melbourne, and it being common property that he also had a connexion with a Mrs. Palmer, it was never supposed that such a thought as marriage would enter his head. But Jane Maxwell, the famous Duchess of Gordon, whose matchmaking capacity was unrivalled, crossed his path. Out of five daughters she married the eldest, Charlotte, to the Duke of Richmond, Susan to the Duke of Manchester, and Louisa to the Marquess of Cornwallis, and she now made up her mind that her youngest daughter, Georgiana, should be Duchess of Bedford. Rumour became busy. It was said that the Duke was attracted, and that the marriage was likely to take place.

Had the Duke confided in Lady Melbourne and given her a hint of his intentions, she would have felt able to direct his courtship, for she loved to manage for her friends. But he had been silent, and this made the matter even more distasteful. Lady Melbourne was first and fore-

most a *femme politique*, and her influence, combined with the Duchess of Devonshire's admiration for Charles James Fox, gave the political tone to the Society of Devonshire House. Lady Melbourne and the Duchess did not scruple to use their charms to captivate admirers whose adherence would be a gain to the Whig Party. In marrying a Gordon the Duke would be taken straight into the stronghold of the Tories and lost to the Whig Party for ever. These rumours had evidently distressed Lady Melbourne greatly, and the Duchess of Devonshire was her confidante. "Themire" for once relaxed her rule and allowed another woman to share her inmost thoughts.

I have on an earlier page spoken of the difference between the customs of those days and our own. Not the least noticeable is the fact that women of that day, dear friends and deep in each other's confidence as they might be, never begin their letters to each other except formally. "Themire" is the only approach to a more familiar mode of address, though their men friends are alluded to with nicknames and in cipher phrases—probably for excellent reasons. The Duchess of Devonshire writes to Lady Melbourne of "Loo," as they called the Duke of Bedford. Though Charles Grey was now married, she speaks of him and his wife often as "Black and Mrs. Black," and says that "she is in a scrape about Loo, but not with Black"; and in another

letter says, "Black is now very good-natured to me, but I do not see him often, and I do not believe anybody knows I do see him." In both these letters "Loo" is mentioned and the rumour about his marriage discussed.

"Make Loo come to me again as he us'd," says the Duchess. "As for the Gordons I do not believe & pretty as the girl is I cannot conceive that the old objections are not as much in force as ever. Besides I am too much of my Brother's opinion with regard to the real Destiny that rules him, & in this instance guards him as his guardian Angel indeed.

"Don't be angry. Whatever you may please to call it surely the firm affection of such a Man as him, and undeniable power over him, is what no one can be very angry at being accused of, *et qui rougit de plaire, doit plaire en rougissant.*"

And again—"You can have no idea how sorry I am to have vex'd you at the Masquerade, but I wish to acquit myself about Black because the truth was that I was worried to death about something else the whole night. Black was not there, nor was I with my cousine except at supper. If *le secret etoit à moi*, which it is not, I could prove to you, that I was bother'd about plagues of others, & that I was heartily delighted to get away. I cannot say I saw any symptoms of bore in a certain person—& he has done nothing but complain of your absence since.

"I am very very sorry that Loo has taken anything wrong. I love him so dearly & think him (independent of gratitude) so delightful, that I

cannot bear his taking anything ill. Alas, when he only sees me, as he does now by starts he can make no allowances. All my faults are in full force & I have not the power to do them away. The head ach, which I see is to be plac'd to a scrape quelquequ'onque—was in fact the consequence of forcing myself to Harrow not to disappoint Hart, when I was knock'd up with the Masquerade. But I can only say & I believe you have done the same often by the boys—I had rather get a head ach or a heart ach, then disappoint them in such a long expected joy, as the Dinner at Speeches is to him."

CHISWICK, *Saturday*.

I could not see you to-day, d[eare]st Love. I really could not sleep & was more disturb'd than I could have supposed—for tho' I am bound by ties of affection, gratitude, & regard to Loo—yet I ought not to feel as much as I do. I think I am more hurt at his having seemed to act out of his *own* good character with regard to you, (tho I have no doubt that it was from the fear of hurting you). It was unlike him—but he has acted strangely towards the girl. I suppose it must be so & indeed *we are all undone*.

Loo's first error, when he resolv'd against the connection was allowing himself to be surrounded by the tribe—he expos'd himself at Kimbolton<sup>1</sup> to the temptation of all others he was most likely to yield to—& tho' his good taste will I suppose a little disgust him with the different society he is about to mix with—yet as they will be all prepared to flatter him & as he is sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Kimbolton, the country house of the Duke of Manchester, who had married Lady Georgiana Gordon's sister in 1793.



entertained with observing original character—of which God knows he will have enough [*sic*]. When I heard him some time ago quote Johny Fordyce as the best existing *farmer*, I perceiv'd that they had been very industrious.

Whenever he thinks proper to tell me I shall say very little. I believe he must be very unhappy,—& indeed I cannot conceive his being happy, unless he becomes different from what he *is*. I think *her* very pretty, very bewitching, & clever certainly, & I have lik'd some things I have seen in her. But certainly there have been stories enough to make one tremble.

But as you said, if he has taken a fancy *tout est dit*. One other thing occurs to me. If he has a mind to recede *can he now with honour?* Good God how could he? It is so extraordinary & so unlike him to have spoken to her before he knew he was free; that either he pretends this to lessen the surprise to you, or that he was inveigled into more than he likes to own—& what a prospect if that is so—what a futurity for Loo to be surrounded with plotting, shabby Scotts men. The very amabilité that some time arises from the grotesque originality of Scotch people is in a line very different from what one should have thought would be Loo's election for the Mistress of Wooburn. However if he can like the kind of specimen of broad jokes (covering however artful designs) which he has seen with the Manchesters—one has nothing to say. He will farm all morning, smoak his pipe with *Manchester*, attend to the domestic differences of *Susan*<sup>1</sup> and *her old man*, & be amus'd with seeing

<sup>1</sup> Lady Susan Gordon, third daughter of Alexander, 4th Duke of Gordon.



the *young one* (that I think is her name even in preference to Georgy) jump over the backs of chairs, &c., &c.

All this I have been extremely amused with for an hour, but should have been sorry to have made it the society of my Life, but then I am not in Love.

Pray forgive my writing in this way, but I must vent myself. I cannot bear the idea of what *he will* be, and I suppose in a few years we shall have him inviting young men to Wooburn to get husbands for May Lenox or the young Fourdyces, with the industry The Duke of M[anchester] & the other Brothers-in-Law follow up the D[uche]ss game whenever she starts it. For God's sake burn this letter. I would not for worlds appear impertinent to Loo, & indeed I feel very much for him, for you, for all of us.

No possible event could have so thoroughly overthrown the habits of our Society as this. But that is not the thing. If he could be wrong to you he is alter'd already in disposition. Why would he not openly avow his intentions? Why expose one to the denying it? Why lead one on to suppose he *knew* the D[uche]ss,—& be all the time preparing what must be such pain?

Well, I shall get accustomed to it I suppose, & if he is happy it will be some consolation, but I never can bear his having vexed you, nor understand it, for I know how much he loves you.

Is there not a possibility that to get rid of the woman,<sup>1</sup> he thought it necessary to marry, & that

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Palmer, with whom the Duke had a connexion of long standing.

that pointed out the fancy to him. No, it must be as you say.

God bless you d[ea]r[e]st d[ea]r[e]st.

Let me know how you are, & tear this rhapsody —& believe how dearly I love you.!

*Probably 1802*

But the Duke of Bedford's course was run. In 1802 he was suddenly taken ill. He bore a frightful operation with heroic fortitude. For a day or two he seemed to rally, but the shock had been too great and on March 2, 1802, he died, aged 37. The mystery as to his engagement deepened, but it was reported that he had sent a message to Lady Georgiana from his deathbed and that his brother John, now 6th Duke, would go to Paris to take it to her.

*(? Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Melbourne)*

*Tuesday.*

I cannot go to bed without writing to you tho my head is very bad. Oh my Love—how anxious & agitated I feel about our dear Loo. I trust the last accounts being so good may give every hope. My dearest Love I cannot express what I feel & suffer for him & how terrible it is to have no means of intelligence. Do not think I am selfish enough to think of my own anxiety only. I do indeed feel yours from my very heart. I dare not rest on the idea of what he has suffered—indeed they have kept the greatest part of the letters from me to-night least it should encrease my head ach. You know how I love him.

*Wedy.* I was so overcome with the shock that they have never given me the detail'd account. I cannot at all calm myself & I own I see everything in the most gloomy way: may heaven preserve him, but I fear the danger is still very great. We wish'd to have set out tomorrow on my account as the suspense & anxiety of not hearing is so terrible but the things could not be got ready. My dearest Love—How shall we meet? Will it be in misery or reliev'd from this terrible misfortune? Believe me no one can feel for you or love you more tenderly than I do. God bless you d[ea]r d[ea]r Love. I cannot write.

D[uke] of D[evonshire] is amazingly good to me & indeed feels himself the greatest anxiety.

The allusions to a “cross-face” and a “scolding” from the Duchess's letters at this time makes it likely that the trials and vexations of the moment were too much for Lady Melbourne's usually serene temper. She must have written a very sharp letter to get such an answer as she did from “Bess,” the intimate friend and companion of the Duchess of Devonshire.

Lady Elizabeth Hervy, or Bess as she was called, was the second daughter of the 3rd Earl of Bristol, and was married at 17 to John Thomas Foster of Dunlee. She was unhappy in her married life, and early in 1780 Foster seems to have gone to complete ruin and to have deserted her. Left as she was with £300 a year and two children, while her father enjoyed an

income of £20,000 or £30,000 a year, she became the object of universal commiseration.

She was remarkably beautiful—her grandmother was the famous Molly Lepel, maid-of-honour to Queen Caroline—more beautiful even than Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, who, hearing of her distress, engaged her as a governess to “Miss W.,” the daughter of a previous liaison between the Duke of Devonshire and Miss Charlotte Spencer. Lady Elizabeth, astute and attractive, soon became the bosom friend of the Duchess. The post of governess disappeared; Lady Elizabeth remained an inmate of Devonshire House, the inseparable companion of the Duchess, whose position with her husband she speedily usurped.

In her picture by Lawrence, her expression is strange and mischievous. Her whole life was passed with the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, but she might have easily found another home, for the Duke of Richmond was her great admirer, though Lady Charlotte Lennox (afterwards Duchess of Richmond) seems to have come between them, and Mr. Fitzpatrick (afterwards General Sir Richard Fitzpatrick, Secretary of State for War) was in love with her. She was in a grumbling state herself, as she writes from Hardwick on February 20, 1802, that she and the Duchess of Devonshire between them had been enjoying the society of James Hare, the wit and delightful companion who was called

“ the Hare of Many Friends,” and that the arrival of their near neighbours Hunlokes, the “ Huns ” as she calls them, had sent him away.

*To the Viscountess Melbourne, Melbourne House,  
White Hall, London*

*From Lady Elizabeth Foster*

HARDWICK, *Feby.* 20th, 1802.

Yesterday when the Post arriv'd, your letter was given to me, & Mr. Robinson said, another letter from Lady Melbourne! well how often she writes to you! Yes, I said, she is the best correspondent possible, & the best natur'd, for if there is anything to tell one she always writes directly, & this will give us an account of C. Fox's speech. Open it, said Mr. R., & tell me what she says. I open it. Well—well, I said, nothing—not a word of Mr. Fox. Nor of any news? said R. No, I said, not a word—two pages & a half of very natural tho' very groundless anxiety about the D[uche]ss who is as you see very well, & the rest wondering why I don't make them leave Hardwick. No, no, replied very naturally Mr. R. it can't be—& nothing else?—Nothing else—said I—& of course I am in a great passion—Now as to your letter Mrs. Lady Them[ire]—where it *deserves an* answer. The D[uche]ss really scarcely coughs—she eats well (generally) & is in good spirits and tho' very nervous at times, yet on the whole she is well, & tho' her cold hung upon her a great while, I think that to all of us who have been used to breast complaints, it is evident her cold was not of that kind,—& her vessels in general appear'd full—for you know when she is well



she is apt to forget all caution & eats & drinks a good deal, & yet don't take exercise enough—but I really think her well now, or nearly so,—& tho' Denman is odious, yet the Surgeon Carrington who attended us all so much last year is very clever & has manag'd her well. So much for that subject—now as to the next—our staying in the country. I did not say that whilst Mr. Hare staid, we must stay too, but that whilst he staid, we, (the D[uche]ss & myself) lik'd being here, & that it was very comfortable, for as to staying, the Duke came here with a determination to stay some time, as there is a Spring he thinks particularly agrees with him, & this being his Plan, we did not like to counteract it, but felt that for him & us, *Mr. H[are]* being with us was everything—& when D[uke of] D[evonshire] went yesterday to invite the *Huns* to Hardwick & that they fix'd on yesterday D. D. forbid its being said in the House, for fear it sd. make Mr. H. determine on going as he had been naming one day after another for his going. However *he did go*—the *Huns* did come, & we are not likely to go soon—nor can I press it, even though I have long been anxious that D. D. should be near Farquhar.<sup>1</sup> *Voyez malicieuses [sic] Miladi si mes raisons ne sont pas valables.* Above all don't go out of town as soon as we arrive, tho' I suppose it will have by that time have lost of its merits.

I hope all is settled and right about Mr. Tierney & black—I wish that odious Mr. Tierney had not such influence with black as he has. I think Mr. Fitzpatrick's answer about T. so good. Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Farquhar, born 1738, died 1819. The fashionable physician of the day.

Robison [*sic*] is still with us and I shall be very sorry when he goes—he was rather indignant at your message about the Play : how very odd the circumstance you tell me of that scene : I won't tell it but it is an odd thing for a Woman of education & birth to act what even a publick audience is expected to disapprove : As to D[uke of] R[ichmond] I am quite certain that he now both feels & I believe laments the line of conduct he adopted. I answered some of his questions fairly & told him where I thought he had acted ill by me, & what alter'd my conduct to him. He said he sd. answer me (which he never has) & that he was a helpless wretched Man. Lady C[harlotte] L[ennox] is an odious being & I sd. like to be certain of never seeing her again. I wish her to believe & know what you say you think she does about you & me. I am glad *D. R.* can hunt, it is the best thing he can do. Adieu, adieu—is not the Prince pleas'd with Mr. Fox's speech—& has he not now a good chance of recovering these arrears & being set quite free ? God Bless you.

## CHAPTER III

### WHIG SOCIETY IN PARIS

PEACE with France was concluded on May 27, 1802. Pitt had been thought by the younger members of his party to give way too much to Henry Addington, whose father's profession gave him the nickname of "the Doctor." Addington's was more or less a Coalition Government. A Coalition Government is a Government which sinks all differences in face of great national danger. When the danger is past it may become in itself a danger.

Peace having been declared the fashionable world of London immediately proceeded to Paris.

Lady Melbourne did not leave England. She received from her friends many accounts of the doings in the French Capital. They seem to have been frivolous enough and remind us in some measure of the days in Paris after the Armistice of 1918. With this difference, however, that in 1802 Paris and Bonaparte stood in the same relationship to us as Berlin and the Kaiser might have in 1918. Bonaparte, it is true, was looked upon as a usurper and a murderer, but just as ladies have been known to offer their hands to famous criminals condemned to

death, so did the ladies of the highest society in England desire to be presented to Bonaparte and his wife. Lord Morpeth<sup>1</sup> was probably in a minority when he prevented his wife, the daughter of the Duchess of Devonshire, from being presented to Josephine whose behaviour while Bonaparte was in Egypt had scandalized many.

It must have been a strange medley in Paris. Lady Holland, Charles Fox and his wife, formerly Mrs. Armistead, went there together. Fox had had relations with Mrs. Armistead before his marriage to her, which took place in 1795, but was not announced till 1802.

Lady Holland, proud of her relationship with the great man, was obliged to accept the presence of his wife. English nobility fraternized with General Massena, called "l'Enfant de la Victoire" by his master,<sup>2</sup> with General Menou,<sup>3</sup> and General Moreau,<sup>4</sup> who was defeated by Sir Ralph Abercromby at the battle of Alexandria in March 1801, and General Andreossi, afterwards Ambassador at the Court of St. James's.

Lady Holland had mentioned Andreossi in a letter to Lady Melbourne, who answered her on October 15, 1802 :

"I shall have great pleasure in making Gen

<sup>1</sup> Howard George, afterwards 6th Earl of Carlisle.

<sup>2</sup> André Massena, duc de Rivoli, Maréchal de France, 1756-1817.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques François de Menou (1750-1810) commanded the army in Egypt after the assassination of Kleber.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Victor Moreau, 1763-1813.

Andreossi's acquaintance as I hear great praise of him from everybody. I am now remaining in Town for some time & will send to him as soon as he arrives, if that should ever happen—for there are strange reports circulated about armaments at Toulon, & Malta's not being evacuated—but I suppose it will all be settled *in some way or another*. Since I wrote I hear great alarms exist in y<sup>e</sup> City about Bonaparte's conduct respecting Holland & y<sup>t</sup> a remonstrance has been sent respecting Switzerland."

Therese Cabarrus<sup>1</sup> gave great dinners to the English gentlemen. It is hardly likely that the ladies called upon this famous beauty, "Notre Dame de Thermidor," who like the woman of Samaria had had many husbands, but he whom she had then was not her husband. She had married in 1778 the Marquis de Fontenay, who divorced her in 1793. After this, in 1794, she married Tallien the Girondist. He divorced her in 1802. Barras, the Deputy whose heart was softened by Marie Antoinette on the journey from Varennes, became her admirer.

Lady Oxford, who was the wife of the 5th Earl of Oxford and whose children were called the "Harleian Miscellany,"<sup>2</sup> was there with her strange *cavaliere servente*, Arthur O'Connor, an Irish Rebel who had sat in the Irish parliament for Philipstown, and, later, joining Napoleon's Army, had been created General. Then there

<sup>1</sup> "La Caberus" of Carlyle's *French Revolution*.

<sup>2</sup> Harley, the family name of the Oxfords.



was the Duchess of Cumberland, formerly Lady Anne Horton, daughter of the Earl of Carhampton, who had married with the Duke of Cumberland, son of Frederick Prince of Wales, in her house in Mayfair in 1771. She had been a great beauty, but came of a strange and eccentric family. Her sister had, after squandering her fortune, been put into prison for debt, where she gave a barber fifty pounds to marry her, and as he thus took on her debts she went free. Lord Erskine, the friend of George Prince of Wales, who was later made Lord Chancellor, though he was ignorant of jurisprudence, was there, and so was the Duchess of Gordon, still smarting over the uncertainty of her daughter's prospects.

All these figures crowd the canvas of the picture drawn by Sir Robert Adair,<sup>1</sup> the intimate friend of Charles James Fox, and one of Lady Melbourne's most devoted admirers. It would be interesting to know what Bonaparte thought of English Society.

On September 27 Robert Adair wrote to Lady Melbourne :

“First of all let me say how rightly I think you judged respecting a message from the Duchess of Devonshire through me. It was all that could be desired, and would have been taken most kindly, but I have received no authority, & to tell you the truth do not expect any, for my name seems to be the *signal of oblivion* with a

<sup>1</sup> The last survivor of Fox's friends, died 1855.

certain great and amiable lady, & any promise made to me, or to do anything where I am concerned, is soon numbered with the years beyond the flood. I could much have wished in the present instance that this was not so, as I find since Lady Holland's departure that she is not supposed to have behaved by any means kindly to Mrs. Fox. I am so very blind a person that I should not most probably have found it out in a thousand years, but I hear it from foreigners & women who have no sort of interest in telling fibs of her. The grand object of jealousy, I fancy, was the intended presentation to Madme. B[onaparte] *on the same day*. This Her Ladyship did not much like, & whether Mrs. Fox's dress really was not ready, or whether she gave the point up I cannot tell, but it did not take place as it had been projected & Lady Holland alone was presented. I take it, however, that she left Paris in great dudgeon, for she fully expected that, after the ceremonial was over, she would have been asked to the private parties. In this she was greatly disappointed, & perhaps Mrs. F[ox] has it all visited upon her. As to Frederick's account, I do not suppose it will differ much from mine, but as I understand your letter, it seems as if he had mentioned their meeting as something formal. Now I do not agree in this, for they met and dined together continually; and whatever *tracasseries* have taken place they passed more behind each others backs than face to face. I am hurt at these fooleries, for they vex both Fox & lord H[olland] excessively.

“The Duchess of Cumberland has behaved most infamously, saying and doing all manner of ill-natured things.

“To finish with lady H[olland], I am sorry to confess that I could not have done without her at Paris. I requested the Duchess, as the only favour she had it in her power to confer upon me, to give me letters. She promised them, with the greatest apparent joy to think she could do anything to please me. From that time to this I have heard nothing about them, and not being a very forward person, should undoubtedly have found no means of introduction whatever had it not been for lady Holland. I own I had rather have been indebted to the Duchess, but I cannot be ungrateful where I *have* received favours.

“I wrote a few words to the Duchess by Sir Francis Baring. I had before written to lady Eliz[abeth] Foster, and given her some account of a dinner we had at Madme. Cabarrus’s. In my letter to her I did not say a word about O’Connor, but between my writing to lady E. & my writing to the duchess, it was all about Paris that Mr. Fox had brought him in his hand, & introduced him as his particular friend. Such an abominable lie made me determine to contradict it, so I wrote to the duchess, to state the fact exactly as it was. It seems that O’Connor is travelling about with lady Oxford, in company with a strange sort of a man whom she has with her to teach her Greek, having heard, I suppose, that it is nothing for a lady to have a turn for philosophy & metaphysicks unless she can read the Greek alphabet. From her rank, & her pretended enthusiasm with respect to Fox, Madme. Cabarrus thought she could not do better than to invite her, & lady O[xford] thought she could do nothing <sup>so</sup> well as to invite O’Connor. She brought him therefore, greatly to the annoyance

of every body there, especially Erskine who carried the matter too far on the other side. Since this, the gossips of Paris have talked of nothing else, and I have no doubt that, among ten thousand other misrepresentations, a fine story will be made out of it for the old women of London. It is very singular but I find that excuses are readily received for every body's conduct except Chas. Fox's, and if he happens to err on the side of good nature, the clamour is only so much the louder. Does Mr. Pitt conduct the Government from blunder to blunder untill the whole power & consequence of his country is destroyed?—Why people are mighty sorry for it, & trust he will do better another time;—but if Fox is commonly civil to a man who is proscribed by the rest of the world, then it is instantly said that he is making common cause with him, & is just as bad and dangerous a person himself. I used to be worn to death by this nonsense, but it is now over. Thank God his Character is too big to mind these childish Criticisms. I wish indeed it were otherwise, as who does not wish, in reading Shakespeare, that he had omitted many irregularities in his composition? But why is such a cruel exception to be made in regard to Fox, and why, like every other Man, is he not to be judged upon the *great total* of his Character? I perceive I am getting angry, but Erskine has made me so by helping on all this folly with his fears. . . .

“Among other great men who are walking about the streets of Paris just now, I fell in the other day with General Massena; and of him I will mention an anecdote which he himself acknowledged to Mr. Fox was true. Within ten days of his Capitulation of Genoa, an Austrian General



Officer was admitted into the Garrison upon some business relative to an exchange of prisoners or some other matter of no great consequence. As he was in conference with Massena, he took occasion to tell him that it was very foolish to have held out so long, that no relief was at hand and that the state of their provisions was accurately known in the Austrian Camp. 'In short,' said the officer, 'we know you have only provisions for ten days.' 'For ten days,' said Massena, 'Why we have not yet begun upon the Monks !' I like both him and Moreau very much. They are plain unaffected men, without any *fanfaronade*. Menou is the stupidest hound you ever saw."

In her anger at what she feared was the failure of her hopes, the Duchess of Gordon seems to have suspected Adair of having made mischief, and he wrote her a letter which she would not forget in a hurry and of which he afterwards sent Lady Melbourne a copy. On October 2 he writes to Lady Melbourne :

"You will hardly believe that the Duchess of Gordon persecutes me even here. She sent me a message by Gen. Fitzpatrick, the substance of which was that she had received a letter from the D[uke] of Bedford, disavowing everything I had said in his name. The Gen[eral] told her that if she desired it he would certainly deliver her message, but that he was quite sure I had never said anything, *purporting to be by the D[uke] of B[edford]'s authority*, without having had such authority. Soon after that, I received



a letter from the Duke, telling me the whole circumstance about his writing to her, & the substance of what he wrote, which is exactly the same as he has told everybody from the beginning; and he added to this his great surprise that she should build so much upon his letter, and endeavour to throw so much blame upon me. In consequence of these 2 circumstances, I wrote a letter to the Duchess which I have sent to England for the Duke to forward or not as he likes. I have been very civil but very severe with her, and trust that this disagreeable business will terminate here.

“I asked Fox yesterday about his Election to the Institute. He says he knows nothing more about it than that La Place & some of the great literary men told him it was intended. I have no doubt that it will be so. If any body should abuse Fox for *receiving* these & other distinctions (I say *receiving* for he does not in the least *covet* them) tell him to come & live a short time in Paris, & see with his own eyes the necessity of there being some leading man in the Councils of England to whom France can look up for the preservation of Peace. I promise you that War is half declared with the present incapable Ministers, who are just able to irritate but much too weak to encounter France or gain any point over her. Addington and his little council of youngsters will be receiving continued insults from France, & when they can submit no longer they will go to War about a straw. If Fox were Minister, Buonaparte could not quarrel with him without rendering his views plain to the world, and quarrelling with all the publick opinion of his own country at the same time. And do

not believe that there is no such thing as publick opinion in France. I will not fatigue you with a dissertation upon this matter but say, in one word, that the reason why there is no expression of the publick opinion is simply because there is no avowed Party, acting upon party principles, in France. As yet, no man can trust his neighbour. They must begin with *individual confidence*—then will follow *Combination*, next to that comes *Party*, and with Party all those checks upon the Government which publick opinion produces & which constitutes the *real* liberty of a State. There are many reasons why publick opinion cannot shew itself in this manner in France, but in a question of Peace or War it would be greatly felt, and yet more perhaps *decisively*, if it were a question of War with a Government of which Chas. Fox was the head. A war with Addington would be much more easy, and indeed as I said before, is half made already.”

It may be added that when Lord John, afterwards 6th Duke of Bedford, whose first wife had died in 1801, came over to Paris with, it was alleged, a dying message from his brother to Lady Georgiana Gordon, her astute mother seized the opportunity and soon made her daughter Duchess of Bedford after all. Even death seemed unable to defeat her matrimonial purposes.

As the weeks went by the letters from Paris grew even more interesting. More friends left England and wrote to Whitehall, picturing the

same scenes from different points of view. Lady Elizabeth Foster with her son Frederick had fled from the dullness of Hardwick to Paris. Then followed Lady Bessborough, sister of the Duchess of Devonshire, witty, amorous and charming, though no longer in her first youth, with her daughter Caroline, then about 17, telling how—

“Lady Georgiana Gordon appeared out of mourning last night; the D[uche]ss is at home almost every evening & I suppose she may be glad herself to let things be forgotten. She has chose to take up a tone of great civility to me; I shall go to her in an evening sometimes for Caro’s sake. Paris is going to be very gay; hitherto it has been like a new world, & I much fear to me will continue so for I cannot accustom myself to being at Paris & not seeing one face I had ever seen before—the Consul’s. Talleyrand, & I believe Berthier, are going to open their houses—but even there I am told the society will only consist of foreigners, & some Bankers & Avocats wives. The only Woman I wish to know is Madame Cabarrus & her I must not. Mr. Robinson is very much smitten I think with her—tell him you have heard so—she is a singular person certainly. If any English person wants to know Tallien she invites him to dinner—if Tallien is invited to dinner of a Sunday, he says no he can’t, ‘je consacre ce jour-là à ma famille,’ and this family is the wife he is divorced from & children none of wh[om] are his. But he persists in calling her Madme Tallien:—but then she is amiable, generous, delightful I am sure—but I am told it is impossible to go—&

she is by this exposed to the worst set of English Women here. However, luckily, there are other samples of English manners and looks—& Lady Conyningham, Lady Louisa Gordon & Lady Georgiana Gordon redeem a little. Nothing can be more extraordinary than the look of the Theatres, as in the boxes next you you see Women who appear to be the lowest kind of tradespeople—the Men worse still—& in coming out, even of the Opera, you are surrounded by men whom you would only see at the Hustings. But the spectacles are excellent.”

George Robinson wrote on November 21, 1802 :

DEAR L[AD]Y MELBOURNE,

I am very foolish in not having written to you before, not that there is much here worth writing about, but it would have entitled me to a letter from you, which at all times, & particularly while I am at such a distance, would be most interesting. I am much obliged to you for your letter to M[a]d[am]e Recamier. She is just come to Paris, & I have left it at her house, but have not yet seen her. L[ad]y E[lizabeth Foster] will probably have written you all the news of the society here, & of publick news we have very little, the people seem satisfied with their present government, more from a fear of the horrors which might attend another change than from attachment to Bonaparte. I observ'd at the play a few nights ago that two or three passages which might be obviously applied were very much applauded. One of the passages was (in Voltaire's *Ædipe*) :

Un prêtre quelqu'il soit, quelque Dieu qui l'inspire,  
Doit prier pour ses rois, et non pas les maudire.



And another which is very strongly mark'd :

Comme il était sans crainte, il marchait sans défense :  
Par l'amour de son peuple il se croyait gardé.

. . . There was another line of a very different tendency, which was very much applauded, speaking of the priests :

Notre crédulité fait toute leur science.

They probably never will get over their aversion to priests though they may to Kings, & I daresay if they cou'd slide quietly into a limited monarchy they wou'd have no objection, though very few wou'd wish to risque another revolution—& France compared to what it was four or five years ago, is in a state of happiness and prosperity. I hope a rupture with England will not take place but from what I hear, *le petit bon homme* is very sore about english newspapers & the speeches which will probably be made at the meeting of parliament will irritate him. Mr. Fox has been illiberally treated in a Jacobinical paper printed here in English called the *Argus*, but it is too contemptible a gazette to pay any regard to it, and I hope there is no one here *now*, who wou'd think it right to answer it. I saw Mr. Fox several times during the short time he staid here after our arrival, & am very sorry he & Mrs. Fox are gone. The D[uche]ss of Gordon has taken their apartments; she has been very courteous to L[ad]y Elizabeth and ask'd all our *petite société* to a party on Thursday & a ball tomorrow,—‘pug of late so kind is grown’ However this is fortunate, for if she had been for war Ly. E[lizabeth Foster] wou'd



have had the worst of it without the Duchess and her Minerva to protect her.”

And Lord and Lady Conyngham, who had been the lovely Henrietta Denison, in the full lustre of her blonde beauty and matchless complexion, they, too, were in Paris. Lady Melbourne hears that the English ladies at Madame Recamier's ball looked to great advantage, and that they were certainly much better dressed than the French. Also that Lady Conyngham was much the handsomest woman in Paris and eclipsed them all. The writer thinks

“that Bonaparte's taste for some of the English who are here has improved the dress of the Women. They are not near so uncover'd as they were—unluckily some English women chuse to dress in the extreme also—but none that can lead at all. We saw Madame Cabarrus the other night : she disappoints at first from her excessive paleness, but her countenance lights up when she speaks, & she is then very handsome.”

Frederick Foster went to the ball and says :

“We have been very gay lately. Last night we went to a Ball at M[adam]e Recamier's, it was a very pretty one & lasted till 5 in the morning. Vestris<sup>1</sup> danced & most excessively well, & there

<sup>1</sup> Famous French ballet dancer (1729–1808). He is reported to have said, “There are but three great men in Europe—the King of Prussia, Voltaire and I.”

was some very fine Dancing besides. The House is not very large but is extremely pretty, the furniture of her Bedroom & Boudoir beautiful. She has been as good natur'd as possible to L[ad]y [E]Liz[abeth Foster] & has promised to invite Moreau to meet us at a small Party. By the bye a person asked Moreau if he ever visited Bonaparte. He replied never, & that 'il a fait une impertinence à moi & à mon armée'—this is pretty strong I think, & as Mr. Hare told it to us, is I daresay true. We have met Jourdan there a good deal. He was, you may recollect, a Member of the Council of 500 & was intended for Deportation by the Directory, but luckily escaped. He is very Gentlemanlike & pleasing in his manners, & is reckoned a very clever & eloquent man, but by no means in favor at present with the Consul, indeed very few of the famous Leaders of the Revolution, good or bad, *are*. I met Tallien at a dinner the other day, he seems quite out of humour with Buonaparte & spoke his mind pretty freely about him. He has the appearance of a *Gentleman Murderer*, & talks of Guillotines & slaughter with the greatest coolness & composure—his manners are very civil & his Conversation & look give me the idea of a Philosophe-Bourreau. He was very communicative & told me that it was their Plan to have murdered the King on the 10th of August but that 'Judas' Roederer, as he call'd him, prevented it, by persuading the K[ing] to go to the assembly. I said—*mais pour la Reine et la famille Royale*, what was to have become of them? *O tout ça aurait passé*—& then, said he, the Republick would have arisen *sage et tranquille*, & we should not have

been embarassed by the Trials of the King & Queen &c. The King, he allowed, was the best man in his Kingdom, & that the Q[ueen] had been cruelly traduced—but he complained of the coldness of her manner to him when he was on guard over them at the Tuilleries & Temple, but that the K[ing] & he agreed very well. He added that it was Cambacérès, now 2d. Consul, Herault de Sechelles, guillotined by Robespierre, & himself who prepared the papers for the King's Trial. On the 9th Thermidor, when Robespierre was overthrown, he told me that he, Collot d'Herbois & Billaud de Varennes placed themselves, armed with daggers, behind Rob[ert] Couthon & St. Just, determined to have stabbed them, had not the Convention decreed their arrest. He said that Rob[ert Couthon] had great Influence over the Populace, & that they had an Idea of his great Incorruptibility. On the 13 Vendemièrre when the Parisians attacked the Convention it was he that recommended Bonaparte to Barras & Freron, to command their Troops, & that B[onaparte] was then so poor that they were obliged to borrow him a Horse & an uniform—& that Bonap[arte] had been very near taking the part of the Parisians—(you recollect how completely he licked them)—but that when Menou wished to parley with the mob & prevent Bloodshed, Bonap[arte] refused, & having waited till they approachd pretty near, open'd upon them a tremendous fire of Cannon, & which to use T[ai]llien's] own word, completely *Balaye'd* them. He lamented very much the death of Hoche, said that Moreau had no *civil* Talents, & mentioned as a good Trait of Gen. Junot, that he was a *bon Sabreur*, tho' no great officer. He said that

the Lawyers had done all the mischief in the Assemblys by their Metaphysicks & Law-jargon, & *really* praised the E[nglish] H[ouse] of Commons for not listening to Erskine & his crew. His only favorites seem to be Barras & Freron—both pretty scoundrels. Danton he admird but thought that in the massacres of September he had perhaps ‘*laissé le peuple trop agir.*’ . . . I think I have given you a pretty good dose of Tallien & its not my fault if you don’t think & dream for this month to come, of Tallien, Barrère, Santerre, the Guillotine & Co. I must just tell you that Barrère considers himself as the Virtuous man, persecuted by the Wicked. He said to a Gentleman that he was afraid the Revol[ution] appeared to the World in the light of a *Crime éclatante*. This Virtuous Martyr, you know, was president of the Committee (of public Safety, I think it was) when in 5 weeks upwards of 1200 people were put to death by its (orders?) & he it was who proposed to ‘balayer’ (the prisons?).<sup>1</sup> I must have done with these (monsters), & say a word about their mighty master the modern Cæsar—whom one can hardly praise or abuse too much. I heard a curious anecdote of him. He told a Gentleman that the Aegyptiens regretted him very much & that their sorcerers predicted his return. We expect to be presented by Lord Whitworth next Monday, & on Thursday I believe to Madame Bonaparte—her son Beauharnais was at M[adam]e Rec[amie]r last night & at the D[uche]ss [of] Gordon’s ball a few nights ago—he seems gentlemanlike & unassuming. By the bye the D[uche]ss Gordon in her happy manner & choice French

<sup>1</sup> MS. damaged.

took the opportunity of observing to Mr. Seger whilst Beauh[arnais] was standing close by him, that Bonap: only waited to equip his fleets to declare War against England."

George Robinson apologizes later for not writing more often, but said he thought it was the fuss about letters which had given him such an aversion to the post. "Everyone who goes to London is loaded with requests," he says. "Dear Mr. Green do you know of anyone who is going—can he take our letters—what a delightful man etc.!"

It would seem as if London must have been empty in those winter days; but Lady Melbourne sat at home in her room called a boudoir in these times, but which the Whig ladies would have called her "dressing-room." She knew that she had done well in remaining with her finger on the pulse of public affairs at home, and was perhaps not sorry that the Argus eyes of some of her cronies could not pierce through the mist surrounding certain schemes she was fostering. The Duchess of Devonshire was also in England, and from Paris Lady Melbourne was told, "You probably have heard all that passes at Devonshire House, as the Duchess must make much of you just now, being the only one of the Sweet Loves left her," alluding to her gushing way of speaking to the women who surrounded her.



The Duchess and Lady Melbourne were glad that they had remained in England. The Addington Ministry had become contemptible. Pitt was chafing at his inaction; Fox had returned to the House of Commons, and his speech on November 24 on the subject of France and England was, according to Mr. Creevy's mind, "perfect."

At Christmas the Duchess of Devonshire wrote from Hardwick complaining of being kept there so long by the Duke's illness, which she impatiently says was caused by his imprudence; like many another wife she ascribed the length of time they spent in London to her husband's love for town. But she showed herself anxious enough to be back there on account of the political situation.

"You will already know that we are kept in this melancholy place, (tho not uncomfortable) by the Duke having the gout in both feet & knees. He was not able to be mov'd from his bed for two days but gives me hopes to-day, as he slept better. He was taken ill at Londesboro' & we were very anxious to get him at once to Chatsworth, where, when he is in his own apartment, everything is on the same floor, & now that stoves are made in the passage to the drawing room he need never be in the cold. But he thought himself able to proceed & had left papers here.

"I do not suppose we shall stay above six weeks, he will be so uneasy at being confin'd

there again. He is very low & thinks we shall never be able to go to the North again. This I trust is the lowness of a person suffering—but the truth is he does come too late, & his imprudence is inconceivable—with the gout violently on him as it had been at Londesboro' & Ferrybridge. He chose to ride 15 miles from Worksop here, in a cold Novr. Eveng., for he did not get in till half past 6, & I declare to God I was thankful that the gout did not return with such violence for he was so cold I thought he had thrown it from his limbs. He ought to come into Derbyshire about the 10th of July & return to Chiswick in October or Novr. But unfortunately he likes London in Summer & his only field amusement is shooting. I wish to God he had bought Wolmars. The real good thing for him wd. be a place near London & yet more the country than this, but he always says he has too many Houses.

“I ask yr. pardon for this long bore but it is impossible not to be very anxious & also vex'd to see a man throw away such a constitution. If you reflect on the life he leads & recollect how well you saw him at Bath, Brocket & afterward, you will allow that he might be what he would except the gout which also I think he might lessen or alleviate by management.

“Caro Pon<sup>1</sup> calls this purgatory & Chatsworth Paradise, & we do wander about like uneasy souls.

“I agree with you that Mr. Foxes career has been perfect, & his speech beyond all expectation (not as to goodness but as to his con-

<sup>1</sup> Caroline Ponsonby, daughter of Lord and Lady Bessborough, married William Lamb in 1805.

descending to explain). I am quite happy at my Br. having met him—& now dr. Love do you not think that they stand a good chance of coming in—if they will be quiet—but if they were to encourage anything that might be construed into alarming principles & all that nonsense they play Pitts game. I look upon it as quite over with him unless he can persuade his friends the alarmists to be alarmed again, & then they will say they prefer Pitt after all his tricks because they have tried him.

“As to these Ministers, with all their absurdities one must feel too oblig’d to them to abuse them, but I don’t think they can go on long—for after such good fortune as they have had, one may rejoice in but not admire their terms, & they are likely to get into scrapes I think.

“Do not you therefore think we may at least see Mr. Fox in office? It is not only my ardent wish from my opinion of him independent of my love for him, but I have 1,000 reasons for wishing it.

“Bless &c.”

## CHAPTER IV

### LADY MELBOURNE'S CHILDREN

IN May 1803 the Peace concluded with France at Amiens was broken. Creevy<sup>1</sup> asks —“ How did the damned Corsican and the Doctor knock their heads together ? ” The famous scene which took place on March 13, 1803, between Napoleon and Lord Whitworth the English Ambassador at the Tuileries, gave an uneasy impression, and on May 18 war with France was declared.

Harriet Lamb died this year. Peniston had begun to show signs of ill health, though in 1802 he had been elected Member for Hertfordshire. Lady Melbourne, fond as she was of her eldest son, did not suffer as did Lord Melbourne, whose passionate adoration for his first-born was well known. In him he traced his own features, though Peniston's were already refined and emaciated by the disease which killed him. We hear of Peniston sometimes as an amateur actor, in which pastime he and his brothers seem to have excelled, otherwise he is but a shadowy figure, for none of his letters exist.

<sup>1</sup> *Creevy Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 11.

William Lamb, the second and favourite son of Lady Melbourne, afterwards Prime Minister to Queen Victoria, was born on March 15, 1779, and was baptized at St. James's according to Torrens, but whether in the Chapel Royal or St. James's Church, Piccadilly, he does not say. He received the usual education of the sons of noblemen at that time. His early youth was passed in the glades of Broomfield and among the stately surroundings of Petworth.

He was taught to read and write by an old Jersey woman who had been his mother's governess. She was a sort of *bonne* and a very disagreeable woman, but his mother adored her. This old woman ended by marrying a Swiss clergyman who had travelled with Peniston as his tutor. He lived downstairs with the family, while she lived upstairs—"one couldn't do that in these days," said her pupil in later years.

In 1790 William was entered at Eton, where his contemporaries in class and game were Sumner, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Stuart, later Lord Stuart de Rothesay, and George, known later as "Beau," Brummell.

As William grew up he was distinguished by his height, his marked features and brilliant dark flashing eyes, so unlike the fair and delicate face and soft blue eyes of his brother Peniston. William went to Cambridge, and on July 7, 1796, he was entered at Trinity College as a fellow



commoner. In spite of the indolence which is often mentioned by his contemporaries, his career both at Eton and at Cambridge was not undistinguished. While a student at the University he read hard in classics. He read for pleasure and from a love of information, and it may be that his indolence existed only in matters where neither his heart nor his taste was involved.

William paid a visit to Inverary Castle in October 1802, where Matthew Gregory Lewis, called the "Monk" from his poem, was also a guest, and wrote to Lady Melbourne a most amusing letter. He travelled with George, 8th Baron Kinnaird, a man known for his taste in art and his sympathy with the early views of the Revolution. About William's age, he became deeply enamoured of his friend's sister Emily.

The Duchess of Argyle, whose beauty was celebrated, for she was a Gunning, had died in 1790, but her daughters Lady Augusta Clavering and Lady Charlotte Campbell, who had married her cousin Campbell of Shawfield, seem to have been the hostesses. The tone and amusements of this country house were no doubt very pleasant to William, to whom a beautiful woman was always agreeable.

The "Monk" wrote :

"Your *Darling* arrived here on Wednesday

last dripping wet, but otherwise in good case and in good spirits. He is at present busily employed upon the composition of a Domestic Newspaper which has been lately established at Inverary and of which he has been appointed Editor for the present week. Three have already been published with great applause, but (in spite of all care) not without *some* heart-burning: the Fourth *of course* will possess all the merits of the three former, unaccompanied by any of their defects; for *you know* it would be impossible for William not to do everything better than anybody else. To tell you the truth (but tell it not in Gath, & let it not be heard in the streets of Askalon) I have some difficulty not to be of the above opinion myself. Inverary is as full as it can hold — & *fuller* too as the Irishman said. Bed-rooms are in great request and William and Kinnaird being the last comers, are moved about from chamber to chamber, never knowing one night where they are to sleep the next. Whoever passes a few hours out of the Castle is certain of finding one of the two new-comers established in his room when he returns; & a formal complaint was lodged yesterday by a great Russian Count, that he only slept out for half an hour, and the first things which He saw lying on his bed when He came back, were a dozen pair of Kinnaird's leather breeches. Our theatricals are in a flourishing condition: We played *The Rivals* last Monday, and though I say it, that should not say it, it was really very well acted. Lady Charlotte in particular played Julia as well as ever I saw it performed. Wm. Campbell was a capital Sir Anthony; and my Sister made a very good Mrs. Malaprop, only her wig not being

properly fastened, the strongest interest which the Audience seemed to take in the performance, while *She* was on the stage, seemed to rest upon the single doubt, whether her perruque would fall off or not. Among other dramatic schemes it was attempted to get up (what Mr. Skeffington calls) a *walking* ballet, and a machine was actually made in which my Sister was to fly up into the clouds in the character of the Queen of the Fairies. Unluckily the want of an Orchestra put a stop to this daring attempt, to the great mortification of the Authoress, who had taken infinite pains in instructing her performers, though her exertions had been repaid with very little success, & very great ingratitude; for the story was voted extremely dull, and the actors made no scruple of wounding her feelings by telling her, that they thought it so. At length at the conclusion of a rehearsal, Lord Lorne being ordered to present her to the Queen of the Fairies, in order to be punished for her crimes, he made her offence sufficiently clear by saying at the same time 'She composed this Pantomime.' This gave it a death-blow, and the first excuse that presented itself, was seized to lay it aside.

"We are now preparing *The Citizen* and *The Mock Doctor*, in the latter of which I have persuaded William to play the part of *Leander*, but He obstinately refuses to be dressed as a shepherd with a wreath of roses & a bunch of cherry coloured ribbands ornamenting his hat, which I am clearly of opinion is the proper dress for the character. I purpose leaving this place with Beaujolois on Wednesday next; William and Kinnaird stay two days longer, when they set out in company with Lady Charlotte & her

*suite*. . . . I did not think it necessary to congratulate you on Pen's election-success, as I trust you are aware how sincerely I rejoice at whatever gives you pleasure ; but I own, if asked my opinion, I should have said, as the Dissenter did to Frederick, ' Truly, Sir, we should have liked your *second* Brother better.'

"Yours most truly,  
M. G. LEWIS.

"P.S.—William's Newspaper has just appeared, in which He informs the Public that He is at length *stationary* in Lady Augusta's Dressing-room."

The law was assigned to William as a profession, though at one moment he appears to have been destined for the Church—a profession which was speedily vetoed by his mother's friend Lord Egremont. His mother wished for a political career for her son and the law was a surer road, while the Church might lead to oblivion. William was entered as a student of law at Lincoln's Inn on July 21, 1797.

He won the declamation prize in 1798 by an oration which was afterwards printed for private circulation. He left Trinity in 1799, having taken his degree, and then, through the wish and instrumentality of his mother, he was received as a resident pupil in the house of Professor Millar at Glasgow University. His brother Frederick,<sup>1</sup> nearly three years younger than him-

<sup>1</sup> Frederick, the third son, was born in 1782. After leaving Glasgow University he seems to have spent a short time in the

self, spent the winter of 1799 and part of that of 1800 there, and was his companion in his studies. History and metaphysics occupied their attention, and William was a brilliant and distinguished debater. His days after he left Glasgow were spent in desultory reading, and his evenings in the delightful society open to him at Melbourne House, at Devonshire House and Holland House, where all the talent and the wit of the day were gathered.

George, the fourth son of Lady Melbourne, born on July 11, 1784, was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, and went the Northern Circuit for a short time, but soon abandoned the law for literature. Miss Berry<sup>1</sup> in her memoirs says he was a good amateur actor, and he produced a two act comic opera, *Whistle Me First*, at Covent Garden on April 10, 1807, which was performed some three times.

His cousin Lady Anne Wombwell wrote to Lady Melbourne, alluding to the opera in a letter filled with the sorrows of her sister Lady Lucan. She having allowed herself to be divorced by Bernard Howard, afterwards Duke of Norfolk, for the sake of Lord Lucan, now found that the latter "did not care if she had a

Royal Horse Guards through the good offices of the Prince of Wales, but in 1803 he took his M.A. degree from Trinity College, Cambridge, and entered the Diplomatic Service.

<sup>1</sup> *Extracts from the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry, 1783-1852.*



bed to sleep on." Poor George Lamb ! his opera was not very successful and became more famous from Lord Byron's biting sarcasms than from its own merit. In Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" he satirized it as follows :

Not that a title's charm can save  
Or scrawl or scribbler from an equal grave ;  
This Lamb must own since his patrician name  
Failed to preserve the spurious farce from shame ;

and later in the poem speaks of " Lamb's Bœotian head," and compared him to Upton, who wrote the songs for the performers at Astley's Circus, because, being one of the Committee of Management of " Mary Jane," he wrote the prologues for the revivals of old English plays.

Byron calls this rudeness " a lucky hit " in the margins of the second, third and fourth editions of his poem. And yet Byron wrote of George in 1810—" He's a very good fellow and, his mother and sister excepted, the best of the set to my mind." Lord Minto, who also met him at a supper at Lady Caroline Lamb's, said he was a good lad.

Some lines from an Epilogue to *Whistle Me First* found among his mother's papers may have been written by him, and give an amusing picture of the Society of the day.

. . . I chang'd a Misses trammel'd life  
For all the glorious license of a Wife ;

And every candid female here allows  
 How hard a Misses life, who seeks a spouse.  
 At Operas, plays, and routs we never fail,  
 Put up, alas ! to everlasting sale.  
 First in Hyde Park, sent by Maternal care,  
 At Noon we walk, and seem to take the air,  
 Or Bond Street's gay resort, for game we try  
 And call at many a shop and seem to buy,  
 While, like a Dealer, the good Matron shews  
 Our shapes, and paces, to the chapmen Beaux,  
 Well skill'd th' unfitting suitor to dispatch,  
 And to allure the Eligible Match.  
 At night again, on us all pleasures pall ;  
 Bid for by inch of candle at a ball—  
 And e'en when fashion's toilsome revels cease,  
 For us no pause, no liberty, no peace—  
 Then when the Matrons speak of suppers small,  
 "A few choice friends besides ourselves—that's all,"  
 This language in plain truth they mean to hold  
 "A girl by private contract to be sold."

(*Endorsed : "Epilogue which was afterwards altered."*)

George was one of those people who seem to be always in trouble of a small kind. In a letter to his mother on January 14, 1808, from Lincoln's Inn he complains :

"I perceive you very well understand the advantage of beginning to call names first, and have quite got the whip-hand of me by your early statement of John Bird's ideotcy, though really it seems to me that people who knowing my linen is in the country, and I am in town, cannot remember to send it by any one of the numerous convenient conveyances, are much more ideotical than he. Particularly too as there must be an

estimate of my stock of shirts procured, before the feasibility of being prepared with one or two can be established against him. However if you mix the ideotcy of both parties together, and bestow it upon one man, he will not in my opinion be half such an idiot as Canning. As you say, he will certainly be praised for it. The robbery of Copenhagen was quite, I believe, unjustifiable and impolitic enough to be very popular, but it will be nothing to this."

George married, in 1809, Caroline Rosalie St. Jules, daughter of Lady Elizabeth Foster. The marriage was fairly successful, but later "Caro George," as she was called in the family, complained much, as did "Caroline William," of the indifference of her husband.

Thus in 1803 Lady Melbourne knew her sons launched in the world, well placed by her own exertions and the aid of powerful friends. But she was not wholly satisfied with them as men. William, especially, was indolent, and in 1799 Lady Holland describes him as "pleasant though supercilious." In 1800 she calls him "very clever and pleasing & will improve when he gets out of his love of singularity." That Lady Holland was sufficiently interested in the young men to take trouble about them is evident by Lady Melbourne's letter to her on October 15, 1802, in which she says :

"William will be very much flatter'd by your

remembrance, he is still in Scotland, & I hope at this time at L<sup>d</sup> Lauderdale's on his way Home. His intention is to put himself immediately under a Special Pleader, & to study from morn<sup>e</sup> till night for a year—which is not a very agreeable prospect tho' it may turn out very useful. I am extremely obliged to you for thinking of my young men & for all y<sup>r</sup> kindness to them, & altho' I have y<sup>e</sup> highest opinion of y<sup>r</sup> skill yet I believe even you would find bringing them to what is call'd polish a very arduous undertaking."

Pre-eminent among those of Lady Melbourne's friends on whom she depended for assistance in the fortunes of her sons were Lord Egremont and George Prince of Wales. The former had early fallen under her sway. He was a discerning patron of the Arts, and his great wealth enabled him to enrich the collection of pictures at Petworth as well as to own a singularly successful racing stable. He was above all a good landlord, and his interest in his tenants and the promotion of agricultural experiments made his death, according to Greville, more keenly felt in the county of Sussex than any individual loss had ever been before. His interest in William's career was great, and Lady Melbourne consulted him frequently. But she had also continued the friendship, which began at Eton, where she danced with him in a "cowlike stile," with George Prince of Wales, and in 1783, when to give her pleasure he made her husband a Lord of the Bed-

chamber to himself, it was said that he admired her more than any other lady of the period. Though in a year or so he transferred his admiration to the Duchess of Devonshire he continued his friendship with Lady Melbourne. She gave him a great proof of the value she placed on it in 1790 when the Duke of York, backed up by the Prince of Wales, asked her to exchange houses. A less astute woman would probably have refused, for she had spared neither pains nor money on the decoration of Melbourne House, Piccadilly.<sup>1</sup>

"It stood," says Torrens in his *Life of Lord Melbourne*, "next Burlington House. The courtyard in front was at that time enclosed by gates, and the space now covered by the chambers of the Albany, was a garden having an entrance opposite Savile Row. On its adornment large sums were lavished by Lady Melbourne with no ordinary taste and skill. Cipriani undertook to paint the ceiling of the ball-room. Wheatley embellished several of the other apartments, while to Rebecca,<sup>2</sup> fast rising into note as a humorist in fresco, the remaining decorations were assigned."

But Lady Melbourne had willingly given way.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Viscount Melbourne*, by W. M. Torrens, chap. i, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Biagio Rebecca, 1735-1808—a well-known painter and Associate of the Royal Academy.



Kindness such as this was not forgotten, and Lady Melbourne often felt able to ask favours, which were not refused. In November 1803 the Prince wrote to her from Brighton :

“The invariable & boundless affection (if you will allow me to speak the truth) my ever dearest Lady Melbourne, which is so strongly imprinted in my Heart towards you, as well as the extreme desire I feel from the sincerity of my regard, & attachment to every Individual of your Family, would have made me most happy had it been in my power to have contrived anyhow upon the occasion of the Vacancy in the Stannaries<sup>1</sup> to have offer'd William anything worthy of his acceptance, but I am & have been so cruelly situated respecting the Duchy of Cornwall that my hands are quite tied, & with sorrow to myself do I say it, must I am afraid continue so for a length of time. All this I will explain to you when we meet, as it is too long a topic for any Letter to contain. However, rest assured of this, that whilst I live I never will neglect an opportunity in which I can be of use to any of yours or in which I can forward any wish of yours, or Melbourne's, as you well know, my ever dearest Friend, at least I hope so, that I can be depended upon.

“Your &c.,  
GEORGE P.”

<sup>1</sup> The districts comprising the tin-mines and smelting works of Cornwall and Devon, formerly under the jurisdiction of the Stannary Courts.

And later, in 1805, an amusing letter about Frederick's career :

“ I was prevented Dst. Lady Melbourne by the presence of Ly. Eliz. from speaking to you respecting our dear Frederick Lamb. It occur'd to me yesterday morning, the promotion in the Blues being so uncommonly slow at all times, & this being the moment of all others in which all young Men that are Subalterns in the Army are endeavouring to raise Men for Rank in particular Regiments, that is to say for any Regt. of Cavalry they may fancy, it would be a very desirable circumstance for Frederick to raise his quantum of men for a Lietcy. which will cost a mere trifle, as they have a right to take the advantage of the Govt. Bounty which is 13 gs. & the quantum that he is to produce to obtain his Ltcy. is only 15 men to the best of my recollection, so that it cannot put him to more than a couple Hundred Pounds expense, were it even to be done in the most extravagant manner. He would come, if it was his wish to raise men for the 10th<sup>1</sup> very high in the Regt. & would not run the risk of being detached from Mackenzie as his Aid de Camp, & which by what I can learn should he remain in the Blues is now most likely to happen, as there is an idea that one of the K—'s absurd fancies, is, that no officer in that Regt. shall be Aid de Camp, in order to make all the Officers join to have the Regt. complete in Officers, & always to continue so, as their future *permanent Quarters* is to be Windsor ; this I should imagine might not be quite what our Friend

<sup>1</sup> 10th Hussars.

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Fred would like, &, I have therefore taken the earliest opportunity of acquainting you with what is possibl done upon this subject, & more especially so as I yesterday mention'd it to the great Greenwood, who said that it would be an excellent thing for Frederick.

"I hope you will be able dearest Ly. Melbourne to be able to read & comprehend what I have been writing though I am scribbling in the greatest hurry. Pray speake to Fred upon the business, & ask him what his inclinations & fancies are upon this head. I can explain to You other advantages also which he may expect from following this plan, but which would take up too much room at this instant to venture to enter upon them; this I will do if I find you alone Tomorrow.

"Yours &c.,  
G. P.

"CARLTON HOUSE.

*Wedy.  $\frac{1}{4}$  pt. 7 p.m.*

*Feby. 6th, 1805."*

In 1787 Amelia Mary, or Emily as she was called, Lady Melbourne's first daughter, was born. She was best known to the world in later years as Viscountess Palmerston, the wife of the Prime Minister, but in 1802 she was but a girl of 15 who had inherited her mother's charm, her social talent, her insight into character, and if it may be said of one so kind, her worldliness.

At the time of her birth her eldest brother

Peniston was 18, and her dearly beloved brothers William and Frederick were 8 and 5 years old. George was only 3 and would have seemed nearer as a companion, but Emily, William and Frederick were always united in a bond of affection more special and more enduring; though, as life went on, neither of the brothers hesitated to criticize the actions of their sister, and Frederick constituted himself her mentor.

Her beauty has been questioned, but her grace and charm were ever famous and have remained a tradition. She says of herself that Lady Melbourne described her, when a baby, as "a little thing all eyes." Her picture painted by Lawrence at the age of 17 shows her looking over her shoulder with a laughing charm, and even in the later days when Hoppner painted her as a young matron, there is a brightness in her serious grace which shows the radiant, delightful atmosphere she must have shed round her everywhere. Lord Melbourne was very proud of her. Queen Victoria once said to him that she had never admired her much in her youth. He replied, "She could beat any of them now. She was always like a pale rose."

As we have seen, Lady Melbourne combined her political preoccupation with due care for the future of her children. When Emily married she had already had another suitor. William's friend Lord Kinnaird had asked her in marriage, and in 1803 she wrote an account of the scene to

her brother Frederick, in whom she confided everything :

DEAREST FRED,

You never could accuse me of weakness again, had you been witness of the scene I bore yesterday. I had no conception of anything like it, & indeed I almost wonder that I could so steadily keep my resolutions, but there is a firmness about me that I can bring forward on great occasions and particularly on this as I was backed by your warning. No, on some occasions I can sacrifice my happiness to that of others—but this is too serious, and besides I should only sacrifice myself to make him unhappy—for I never could feign what I did not feel—so we parted yesterday in a most desperate manner,—& tho' I was really unhappy all the evening & had a most dreadful headache yet I put on my usual composure. This morning he sent to beg a conference with Mama & *one more* with me. This was acceded to—but with considerable nervousness on my part—it began worse than yesterday's with a great many oaths on his part taking heaven & earth to witness that he could love only me. I endeavour'd to compose him & to explain the case, namely that I would love if I could but that I could not & that my friendship he should have. He only begged me to forget everything that had passed, that he repented having spoken to me—that he only desired to see me as he had done, that I would behave to him with as much confidence as usual & that he was quite sure in time I should love him. I said I could not say anything as to the latter but that



all I wished was to live with him on the same terms as formerly, & this is decided. Tho I plainly told him that I did not feel myself the least bound, & that I desired he would not feel so either, nor that he would not hope that I should love him, & that I never would marry unless it was to a man whom I loved better than all the world besides—he said he never would accuse me of giving him false hopes whatever might happen as I had plainly detailed the case, so here we rest—quite independant—& indeed I wish I did love him for nobody ever appeared so sincere or so deserving—but somehow it is a feeling that cannot be commanded. He pressed me hard to know if I loved no one else; this I denied as indeed I can with perfect truth—he then desired to know whether I liked no one *as well* or *near* as well as him—this I would not answer, as I thought it more than I could with safety say. Dearest Fred, I don't think you can disapprove me, indeed I don't think you will—for I have acted so very steadily that I should not care if every word I said to him was published to the whole town, but however let me beg you to keep your own counsel & to let nobody know anything about the whole transaction. I tell nobody for I think it is acting dishonourably towards him, & Mama says she knows nothing about it, so dearest Fred be secret & write to me; if this is not clear or detailed enough I am ready to scribble quires, only tell me. I wish you would come to town that I might sit in your room of a morning; it is so very comfortable, besides this is the month you was to return.

Yrs. ever affectly.,  
EM. L.

It is possible that Lady Melbourne had always had other intentions for her daughter. As early as 1801 she was receiving communications from the Duchess of Devonshire about Peter Leopold, 5th Earl Cowper, who had just appeared in London Society ; a man of much personal beauty and the owner of great possessions. He was then about 23 years old. The Whig Circle pounced on this charming fellow, and the Duchess of Devonshire wrote enthusiastically from Chatsworth on December 17, 1801, to say that he was handsomer than Lord Granville Leveson Gower, the Adonis of his day, who it was supposed had broken countless hearts. This was very high praise. She also comforted Lady Melbourne by saying that Lady Andover, the beautiful daughter of Thomas Coke of Holkham and the young widow of Lord Andover, the eldest son of Lord Suffolk, who had met a tragic death in 1802 by the bursting of his gun, had made no impression on Lord Cowper, adding that he had also been frightened by Lady Harrington out of any inclination for her daughter :

“ I was quite ill yesterday & am not well today. I saw dr. L[or]d C[owper] however & Luttrell —& I cannot tell you how we all, aye, *all*, Ld. Morpeth & Granville included, regret him. As for Bess she has not yet been seen tho’ brilliant Hunting is going on & G.<sup>1</sup> has just told me she believes that *Calypso ne peut se consoler du depart d’Ulysses*.

<sup>1</sup> Lady Georgiana Cavendish, the Duchess’ daughter.

“He is indeed one of the most amiable creatures I ever knew & the one almost without exception who improves the most on acquaintance. His understanding is not only good but cultivated—& yet so unassuming that you must draw him out to know all he knows. His manners are so gentlemanlike & his good nature so evident that I defy him not to be lov’d—as to person, the Duke & all the young ladies have given it in his favour even thinking him handsomer than Ld. Granville—& Georgiana is quite, quite regretting him. Luttrell<sup>1</sup> told me he should not wonder if I still found him in London. I do not know why I wish it, but I do. He is so amiable that I will not be selfish & if it is better for him to go I must wish it.

“For God’s sake write a letter to Adair<sup>2</sup> for me—or he will be gloomier than ever and really, poor Devil, he means to keep to the letter of his duty & I shd. be miserable if he thought I had misrepresented him to you. I hear since my absence he has been very gloomy. He much dislikes C[owper]’s general success.

“I hope Ld. Cowper liked us as we did him. I was really quite nervous at his going. He entered so well into our way of life & seemed to mind so little our irregularities, that I feel as if we had lost one of ourselves. Luttrell has often opened about him. He said Ly. Harrington had taken the true mode of frightening him, & that she cried one day to Luttrell at Ld. Cowper’s change, tho in fact he said there was no change for that he never had any fancy about the girl

<sup>1</sup> Henry Luttrell, wit and poet of Society, 1765–1851, natural son of Lord Carhampton.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Robert Adair, 1763–1855.

or Ly. Andover. As to you he certainly feels most sensibly all the full power of your *amabilite*, & is no icicle in talking of you—but Luttrel I have no doubt keeps a good watch. What does he mean to do with him?

“He told me Ld. C. was the most open creature in the world & had no mysterys and reserves. I like Luttrel. I think him very pleasant & Ld. C. has told me very noble traits of him—but how foolish it would be in him to try to keep him from all attachment or to fancy his own friendship is to suffer from any other inclination. Ld. Cowper will not marry early I daresay and Luttrel seems to dislike the idea of the 2 marriages I mention’d—in short they are rather riddles. But the woman will be happy whose fate depends on C. [MS. damaged] the only fear for him is that by being thrown [MS. damaged] these dinners &c., he may hurt his health.”

Lord Cowper kept up a more or less regular correspondence with Lady Melbourne, and must have seen much of Emily. Early in 1805 his letter asked for permission to visit Brighton, where she was staying with Emily; and in May he wrote to her saying:

“A thousand thanks for your kind letter. I really cannot thank you for it as I ought, for I am nearly the same person that you saw me on Monday, and you may easily judge therefore how unfit I am to do justice to the kindness it conveys. I shall be extremely happy to come to Bocket on Friday and stay till Monday when I think the whole may be declared. Pray do not mention

it before we meet. . . . I shall certainly get it all arranged before we go to town ; you must not go to D. House tomorrow night or I know very well that your looks will betray you.

"Don't you think that if the above proposal is right that the communication between the lawyers ought to be deferr'd till we get to town. I own it goes to my very soul that a moment should be lost and I am hardly able to resist such a triumph as impatience would have over prudence in such a case, but I believe after all it will be best. I am glad Lord Dorchester is not here, for I believe it would kill me. Pray burn this.

"Yrs. most affectly.

"COWPER.

"PANSHANGER,  
Wednesday. 1805."

Next night he wrote to Emily, almost doubting his own happiness :

"Pray is it a dream or not ? for as I am quite alone here I am so distrustful of my own thoughts that I cannot decide which. I shall not therefore be easy till our meeting at Brocket tomorrow (if indeed so delightful a thing is to happen) convinces me that I am no longer to doubt of the happiness which I now contemplate *indistinctly*. The last thing that I remember with certainty is that you promised at Devonshire House to carry a bottle of Champagne in your pocket to Mrs ---'s ball by way of encouragement to me to dance, & as that ceremony has not taken place I feel half persuaded that there has been some good reason to prevent it.



“Thank you a thousand times for your very pretty plans of bridges: I think they are admirably suited to the character of the place but as the choice of everything here remains with you I will not pretend to have an opinion about the execution of them. There was a great smoke this morning from the Welwyn<sup>1</sup> side of the country, but whether it proceeded from the burning of turf at Digswell,<sup>2</sup> or Mr. Johnes’s *fire and faggot* I do not know—you will allow that the latter is at least as likely as the former. Good bye my dearest Emily till we meet & believe me always

“Yours most affectionly.

COWPER.”

The marriage took place in the drawing-room at Melbourne House on July 6, 1805, when the bride was only 18. In a letter written on her honeymoon, she speaks of her great happiness and thanks her mother, through whom this joy has come to her: “It is owing to you dearest Mama, that I can thus sign my name inside this pledge of happiness ‘Emily Cowper’”—the name written inside the drawing of a wedding ring.

In spite of her charm, and perhaps for this very reason, Emily had not been a popular girl. Lady Bessborough, sister of the Duchess of Devonshire, who at that time was taking out her sister’s daughter Harriet, afterwards the wife of Lord Granville Leveson Gower, accused her of being deceitful, and complained of her

<sup>1</sup> Welwyn, Herts, on the Brocket estate.

<sup>2</sup> Digswell, on the Panshanger estate belonging to Lord Cowper.



COUNTESS COWPER

AFTER THE PICTURE IN THE POSSESSION OF LADY DESBOROUGH  
AT PANSHANGER.



being unkind about her niece Harriet. Harriet herself did not like Emily and also accused her of insincerity. When writing to her sister, Lady Carlisle, in 1807, Harriet could not forbear giving a sly dig at Emily Cowper, who, though very nervous on a strange horse, had chosen to ride instead of drive, because she "so much preferred the society of gentlemen to ladies." The strain may have been too great, as we learn later that when Lady Cowper went to Chatsworth in 1813 she took her own horses.

## CHAPTER V

### LADY CAROLINE

THE vacancy in Hertford caused by Peniston's death was filled by a Tory named Baker, much to Lady Melbourne's annoyance. The Marquess of Salisbury, head of the great county family in Hertfordshire, was a Tory, and the Cecil's candidate carried the day. William had refused to stand—his mind was taken up with other matters—but he was Chairman at the County Meeting, and the Duchess of Devonshire wrote :

“Miss Hare writes me word that it was believed that if William had stood he would have carried it. She says—odious Baker, where he can't show his head he leaves his sting.”

Lady Melbourne, worn out with the fatigue of Peniston's illness, had retired to Brighton, the Prince of Wales having lent her the Pavilion, and the Duchess says :

“I quite love the Prince for his good nature in lending you his House, & I am sure air and quiet will do you more good than the constant exertion you were forced to here. Everybody is anxious about you & enquiring about you. I shall tell the Prince what you say of the comfort &c., &c.”



There she got another letter from Lord John Townshend, the son of the 1st Marquess Townshend, one of Fox's friends, who had eloped with Mrs. Fawkeners, the niece of the Duchess of Devonshire :

“ I can't help writing to congratulate you on W[illia]m's speech at the Hertford Meeting, which I hear from all quarters was most judicious & well timed, as well as eloquent & splendid. It played the devil however in one respect, as it prevented my son Fox,<sup>1</sup> who is eager on every occasion to spout, from saying a single syllable. He had concluded, & so had I, that there would be nothing but uproar & confusion & addled brains at this meeting, where it was expected that Baker & Flower wd. have had a sparring match : both probably equally absurd ; the one contending for the most unqualified adulation of Castlereagh &c., and treating the subject of the omission in the treaty abt. the Slave Trade as too trifling to deserve notice, & the other insisting (as he declared he wd. do) on the necessity of a Vote of censure against Wilberforce & the other hypocritical abolitionists, who have uniformly supportd Ministers & wd. continue to do so, even if they revived the Slave Trade in its fullest Extent tomorrow.

“ Fox therefore thought there wd. be sport, & an opportunity afforded him of making some pithy observations in reply to two furious wrong-headed antagonists, & he meant to rise, a young Nestor, to compose differences, & to support Wm. Lamb with all the power of his lungs.

<sup>1</sup> Fox, son of Lord John Townshend, probably called after his father's intimate, Charles Fox.

“ But as no such opportunity was given, from Wm. Lamb’s prudent & judicious management & irresistible appeal to the Meeting, & all was harmony & union. Fox was very properly as mute as a fish. This is one proof of Wm.’s success. Another & a better is, that Tom Lloyd, in descending from his pulpit on Sunday, ran up to our Pew & grasping me by the hand roared out ‘ What a d....d shame it was that you did not come to hear Wm. Lamb t’other day—His speech has done him more than a three years canvas by G-d.’ ”

Lord John Townshend ended up, as most people who wrote to Lady Melbourne did, by asking her to compass a favour for him through William Huskisson,<sup>1</sup> the new Surveyor of Woods, who had married Lady Melbourne’s niece, a daughter of Admiral Mark Milbanke, a few years before.

William had become a frequent visitor at another house outside London, where the brilliant and fascinating sister of Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, Henrietta Spencer, wife of Frederick 3rd Earl of Bessborough, welcomed her sister’s guests, and there he met her only daughter Caroline. After a long, and at first fruitless, courtship, he married her on June 6, 1805, a few weeks before his sister Emily’s marriage with Lord Cowper.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Melbourne told Greville that in his opinion Huskisson was the greatest practical statesman he had ever known, the one who best united theory with practice.

This connexion with the great Whig family must have pleased Lady Melbourne, and she subordinated any anxiety she might feel on the score of Caroline's mentality to political advantage. She was so accustomed to sway the wills of those about her, that she would hardly expect any difficulty from an unformed girl of hardly 20. Caroline and William would live under her roof in the fashion of the day, just as Maria Fane, the wife of Lord Duncannon, Caroline's eldest brother, went to live with Lady Bessborough. Lady Melbourne may possibly have discounted the fact that William was desperately in love and might see through Caroline's eyes instead of her own. It is hard to believe that she could not have stopped the marriage if she had so determined. However, she took care not to look too pleased, so as to place herself in the position of conferring the honour and not of receiving it.

There is an amusing account of a passage of arms between the two mothers-in-law, given in one of Lady Bessborough's letters to Lord Granville Leveson Gower. It was of course well known that Lady Melbourne was gratified at the great Whig connexion her son was making, but when the engagement was finally concluded she lost no time in showing that she knew full well that there were disadvantages as well as advantages in the marriage, and Lady Bessborough on May 12, 1805, gives an account

of a visit to Lady Melbourne in which the latter gives her various "unpleasant cuts" as Lady Bessborough calls it, telling her that she hopes the daughter may turn out better than the mother; "whether as a plan of subduing me," concludes poor Lady Bessborough, "I do not know."

The later history of William's unhappy wife is best told in her own words to Lady Morgan before her death. Lady Caroline, then near her end, tells Lady Morgan that she had been a trouble and not a pleasure all her life. She recounts how her mother having had a paralytic stroke, she was sent to Italy at the age of 4 to be out of the way, and lived there under the sole charge of a maid Fanny until she was 9 years old. Her grandmother Lady Spencer, who afterwards took charge of her, was alarmed by her waywardness and ungovernable fits of temper, and consulted Doctor Warren. He forbade her to learn anything or to see anyone, for fear that the violent passions and strange whims should lead to madness, though he would never allow that she was mad. She speaks of her intense love of music, which seems to have soothed her as it soothed Saul. Later she tells how she was taken to Devonshire House and lived with the other children there, neglected by their mothers, "served on silver in the morning and carrying their own plates down at night," and thinking that "the world was divided into dukes and beggars." Warren was probably right—

she was not mad. She was the product of the corrupt and vicious mentality of the society which had given her birth.

Lady Morgan has left us her picture.

She was tall and slight in her figure, her countenance was grave, her eyes dark, large, bright, her complexion fair. Her voice was soft, low, caressing, at once a beauty and a charm, and was responsible for much of that fascination that was so peculiarly hers. She was eloquent, most eloquent, full of ideas and of gracious, graceful expression, but her subject was always herself. She confounded her dearest friends and direst foes, for her feelings were all impulses worked on by a powerful imagination.

“One of her great charms was the rapid transition of manner which changed to its theme. The chief cause of the odd things she used to say and do was, that never having lived out of the habits of her own class, yet sometimes mixing with people of inferior rank, notable only by their genius, she constantly applied her own sumptuous habits to them.”

“And Lady Caroline was a woman gifted with the highest powers, an artist and a poetess, a writer of romance, a woman of society and of the world, the belle, the toast, the star of the day. She was adored, but not content. She had a restless craving after excitement. She was not wicked, not even lax, but she was bold and daring in her excursions through the debateable land between friendship and love. If she never fell, she was scarcely ever safe from falling.”



She told how at the age of 15 she fell in love with William Lamb as the embodiment of the views on liberty which she so admired in Fox.

But Caroline knew her own wayward and fitful character only too well, and when William Lamb, deeply enamoured of her, asked her to marry him, she refused, because her temper was too violent. But when he asked her a second time her love conquered her judgment. Her first instinct had been the right one, for the marriage proved most unhappy. Their life was one long quarrel, with intervals of reconciliation. The quarrels grew longer and the reconciliations less frequent. It has always been supposed that Lady Caroline's fantastic intrigue with Byron was the only ground of complaint that her husband had against her, but some of the ensuing letters will show that her mother-in-law's sense of propriety had already been shocked by her open delight in the attentions of Sir Godfrey Webster, the former husband of Lady Holland. And yet to her confidante Lady Morgan, Lady Caroline complains bitterly :

“He [William] cared nothing for my morals. I might flirt and go about with whom I pleased. He was privy to my affair with Lord Byron, and laughed at it. His indolence rendered him insensible to everything. When I ride, play and amuse him he loves me, in sickness and suffering he deserts me ; his violence is as bad as my own.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lady Morgan's *Memoirs*. Sidney Lady Morgan, born 1783, died 1859, novelist and poet.

The years 1805 and 1806 are years of death. The noble figures which had led the English nation fell one by one, and it seemed as if the price of victory was the sacrifice of the greatest men of the age. At Trafalgar Nelson fell. From the shock of Napoleon's victories at Ulm and Austerlitz in 1805, Pitt never recovered and on January 23, 1806, he expired.

At the funeral of Nelson many had remarked the ravages which fatigue had made in Fox's health. His acceptance of the Seals of the Foreign Office was forced on him as Greville became Prime Minister. He appeared on June 10, 1806, in the House of Commons in order to move certain resolutions preparatory to the Bill for abolishing the Slave Trade, but he was already exceedingly ill. On September 13, early in the morning, it was known that he was dying, and with sweet words of love to Mrs. Fox on his lips, he passed away at a quarter to six in the evening.

Four months before his death, the beautiful woman who had admired him from girlhood died. On March 30, at the age of 49, after two or three days agony, the Duchess of Devonshire left the world which had courted and worshipped her.

Her death must have affected Lady Melbourne deeply, in spite of the composure she affected on all occasions. The only trace of it in her correspondence is a letter she received from the

Duke of Richmond in answer to one she had written to him, urging him to go to town to comfort Lady Elizabeth. It is possible that she, like all the late Duchess' friends, feared that a marriage would take place between the Duke of Devonshire and his wife's inseparable companion Lady Elizabeth Foster, and thought that it might be well to show her that there was another Duke available. He, however, declined the suggestion, and wrote from Goodwood saying :

*"April 2nd, 1806.*

"You are always so kind & good to me that I can never sufficiently thank you, my Dear Lady Melbourne. I am not surprised at Lady Elisabeth's fortitude for she has a strong mind, but I fear, as you do, that the weakness of Her Body may not be equal to all the Trials she is put to. I should fear it would be particularly distressing to her to have to keep up the Dowager Lady Spencer's spirits who never was very kind to her. I long to know how she goes on & have written to Farquhar to let me know. I have also written to Lady Elisabeth, but begged she would not take the trouble of answering me. I would readily go to town as you advise could I hope to do any good, but under all the circumstances you know, I should almost fear the contrary. I am also expecting Lord & Lady Bathurst & their Children here to-morrow. Pray let me know how you go on, for with all Your Philosophy and good sense you have a Heart that must suffer dreadfully on such occasions and make the best Health feel its consequences. I am glad you are

gone out of Town for some days to be removed from the melancholy faces you must everywhere meet with in Town.

“ Believe me ever your faithfull  
humble servant,  
RICHMOND.”

It was recognized that after the Prince of Wales' attachment to Mrs. Fitzherbert he went but little to Devonshire House; in fact, Mrs. Fitzherbert told Mrs. Creevy that “ he only went into it from motives of compassion and old friendship when he was persecuted to do so.” Mrs. Fitzherbert added that she knew the Duchess hated her.<sup>1</sup>

Lady Melbourne, less impulsive and with more worldly wisdom, had retained the Prince's friendship by her civility to Mrs. Fitzherbert, who constantly sent her messages in the Prince's letters.

The Prince of Wales attended the christening of Lady Melbourne's two grandsons: Lady Cowper's eldest child, a son, afterwards 6th Earl Cowper, was born in July; and Lady Caroline Lamb's, also a son, and named Augustus Frederick, in August 1807. He was their only child, and he died in 1836 at the age of 29, still a child in intellect and character. In writing about the date of the last ceremony the Prince becomes jocular—“ begs his best love to dear Melbourne,

<sup>1</sup> *Creevy Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 71.

Lady Bessh, not forgetting my Emily and the dear Boys," and ends :

"Pray tell me whether the little Lambs Poll continues quite black. I do not write to Lady Bessborough as I trust to your saying everything kindest to her (not forgetting the return of a kiss) and explaining and settling everything with her."



## CHAPTER VI

### POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND ITS REWARD

LATE in November 1810 King George had a severe recurrence of his malady, and it was necessary again to appoint the Prince of Wales as Regent. The Prince was not at all disposed to submit to the restrictions which had curtailed his authority during his first regency, and the Whigs, who had hitherto looked on him as the main support of their party, had naturally no wish that any restraint should be placed on his power. But the Prince ultimately gave the deathblow to Whig hopes by taking the oaths in accordance with the Bill restricting his authority framed by the Tory Ministers.

The Prince had, though after considerable delay, disregarded the Tory Ministry, and sent for Lords Grey and Grenville and asked them to draw up replies to the addresses from the two Houses on his appointment as Regent. Their drafts he returned with corrections in Sheridan's handwriting on the margins. Lord Grey refused to accept the corrections or to frame another reply ; his opinion of the Prince's answer being

that it was "in its whole tenour and character utterly objectionable."

After most unsatisfactory interviews and communications between the Prince and Lords Grey and Grenville, they were able to announce on February 2 that the Prince would retain his Tory advisers. His excuse was that both Queen Charlotte and the physicians told him that the King was on the road to recovery, and, should he become convalescent, it would possibly throw him back if he found his old advisers out of power.

The Whig Party were completely dumbfounded by the Prince's change of front. They had staked all their hopes on him. Lord Albemarle had, under the impression that the Prince could be depended upon, written to Thomas Coke, Member of Parliament for Norfolk, to "quit again his own fireside to support the Prince in his last great struggle against the Regency Bill."<sup>1</sup>

Catholic Emancipation had been promised to the Roman Catholics as the price of their support of the Act of Union between Ireland and England in 1801. From George III's unconquerable aversion to the passing of this measure, it had been perpetually defeated, but now in 1811 the Whigs concluded the measure would be passed should they come into power.

When Lord Albemarle learnt that the Prince had submitted to the will of the King's Tory

<sup>1</sup> The Bill curtailing his powers as Regent.

advisers he was furious. He foresaw that the pledge given to Ireland would not now be redeemed, and endeavoured to show the importance of the promise made at the time of the Union by England.

It is interesting to see how much the Whigs believed in the influence of Lady Melbourne over the Prince Regent, for Lord Albemarle wrote to Lady Melbourne in a way which would lead one to suppose that she was a frequent channel of communication with the Prince. He urged that the Prince should endeavour in some measure to restore the confidence of the Catholics. By opposing a Bill for Catholic Emancipation, he would gain no personal popularity, as Perceval was known to be hostile to them and would get the credit and not himself. Lord Albemarle writes :

“The chief, indeed the only point to press, if the opportunity should offer, is that of the Catholics ; and to shew how much the reputation, and even the quiet, of his future reign will depend upon his conduct towards them *now* : that whether the Proclamation was right or wrong, it is no matter ; but the circumstances of its having been put forth and actually enforced, makes it still more incumbent on the Prince than it was before to *do something* which may regain the confidence of the Catholics, which he must perceive is shaken by that measure : that he must not suppose that matters during the next Session will go on so quietly as they have done hitherto, and here it may be observed to him that the Catholick

petition will be supported by Mr. Fox's friends *as that specifick question to which he was more distinctly pledged than to any other*, and as one which he has left as a legacy to all those who acted upon his principles, and who were attached to his person.

"It would also be most useful to point out to him that if he abandons the Catholics, the whole disgrace will be his, as Perceval's hostility to them is already known and pronounced, and that if the measure is defeated by Parliament (which is by no means certain) whatever credit may be obtained from the highchurch party for so defeating it will belong solely to Perceval.

"It would be better to say nothing about persons unless he speaks first."

Lady Melbourne on receiving this communication must have doubted how to act for the best. She was in the country, probably at Brocket, and she could hardly ask to see the Prince without some good reason, and had he suspected her of any attempt to influence him, he might have refused to see her.

She had an excellent reason to her hand. She felt that the time had come for her third son, Frederick, to rise in his career, and she wanted a step in Diplomacy for him as soon as possible ; so she wrote a letter to the Prince which received the following reply :

YORK HOUSE, ST. JAMES'S.

*Sept. 17th, 1811.*

MY DEAR LADY MELBOURNE,

I have not, until the present moment, had

hardly one moment to myself, since I received your kind Letter, to acknowledge it & to return you my best thanks for it. It is not my intention to enter into the details of it in this Letter, as I can so much better enter both into your wishes, as well as further views respecting Frederick in a personal Interview & conversation with you, than I ever can manage to do, by even ever so long a succession of epistolary correspondance, & which at best is but a very poor succedanium for the other mode. If, therefore, in consequence of what you were so good as to write me, & if it should be attended with little or no inconvenience to yourself, you can have the goodness to come to town any Day in the course of this week, or in the commencement of the next, you will find me still stationary here, & I will do myself the pleasure of obeying your commands *quand bon cela vous semblera*, & when you may choose to make an appointment with me. I will not tresspass any longer upon you at present than to desire everything that is kind to Melbourne & every good wish to the Circle around you, assuring you that I am at all times, dear Lady Melbourne, ever

Your very sincere Friend

& humble Servant,

GEORGE P.R.

It happened fortunately that Lord William Bentinck, son of the 3rd Duke of Portland, who had been appointed Envoy and Commander-in-chief of the British forces in Sicily in 1811, suddenly returned for further instructions after about ten days stay in the island, owing to a



dispute about the subsidy from England. The Queen Maria Carolina, sister of Marie Antoinette, was the real ruler, as the King was notoriously incapable of reigning and was known to be intriguing with the French. When Lord William, whose behaviour was approved by the Cabinet, returned to the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, probably as a result of Lady Melbourne's request Frederick accompanied him as Secretary of Legation, although then only 29. Lady Melbourne might well deserve the remark of an anonymous writer styled by himself "Anacharsis," who writing to her in 1808 from the Headquarters of Sir John Moore during the Peninsular War, urged her "to undertake the patronage of a school for the education of all future Ministers of War, the Colonies, and of Foreign Affairs."

There is no record of the interview between the Prince and Lady Melbourne, and we only know that later she was rewarded by a letter from Albemarle, who said that Frederick, who was now with Lord William Bentinck in Sicily, had better remain where he was, as he would probably receive the Embassy in time, and it would lead to Dresden, and afterwards to Vienna or one other of the great Diplomatic posts. He then proceeded to suggest—

"Certainly there is no pretence for Frederick coming away after the assurance you have re-

ceived about Mr. Gordon, and although Lord Castlereagh's *if* contains exactly what I expected it would, I think under *all* circumstances he had better stay; for they cannot even send another Ambassador without finding an equivalent for Frederick, & giving him pretensions at a future time to the Embassy itself. Dresden must soon be open, and a most important post it will be if anything like the *Old Balance* is restored. You know I always mentioned that Court to you as the best preparatory one for Vienna, or the other great Missions.<sup>1</sup>

“And now I will tell you something about myself. Lord Grenville's speech makes me think it *possible* that Lord Grey may no longer object to my going to the Continent on the only terms on which I should myself agree to go, namely to *consolidate a general alliance preparatory to negociations for a general Peace*. If this should be so (which it will not be long before I know) I intend making an offer of my services for that purpose; and I should in the first instance make that offer to the Prince, who is entitled to it from *me* considering what passed at our last interview. Neither the offer however, if successful, nor any arrangements to which it can lead, would interfere with Frederick's future hopes for Vienna, on the contrary—in my present view of the subject, those hopes would rather be promoted by them. I will explain all this if what I have mentioned does not fall to the ground.

“I know by reputation the Baron Stein;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Hon. Frederick Lamb did eventually become Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of the two Sicilies in 1812.

<sup>2</sup> Baron von Stein (1757–1831)

and from all I heard formerly a more difficult person to deal with (if *we* are to have any transactions with him) is not to be found on the continent. But I think I could counteract him in a Congress provided my confidential intercourse with leading persons in the Austrian Councils were restored. Stein is (or used to be) a thorough Prussian, and I am sure can never have the confidence of Austria."

In 1812 the restrictions on the Regency expired. The state of the King's health made it unlikely that he would ever be well enough to resume the duties of kingship.

The Whigs now expected with certainty to be called to power. Lords Grenville and Grey were indeed sent for, but when they demanded the right to nominate afresh the chief officers of the Household the Regent refused. An effort was made through the Duke of York to bring about a coalition with some of the Ministers in power. The Regent wrote to his brother expressing a wish that Lords Grey and Grenville should "strengthen his hands and form a part of his Government by joining the ministry of Mr. Perceval." They replied "that the differences of opinion between them were too many and too important to admit of such a union."

The fact was that the Prince had become satisfied with his Tory advisers; it appears that he had ceased to care for Whig surroundings from the day that the Duchess of Devonshire

had interfered with Mrs. Fitzherbert. He still, however, often visited Melbourne House, and even though in the hands of a Tory Ministry, insisted on retaining Lord Melbourne as one of his Lords of the Bedchamber.

In 1812 Lord Boringdon moved an address to the Regent, begging him to form an administration which would command the confidence of all classes. March 19 was fixed for its discussion, and the ladies of Melbourne House assembled with their most intimate friends to learn the earliest tidings. Lady Holland and Miss Berry and many other ladies waited there till long after midnight for their friends from the House of Lords. When they came they bore the signs of a defeat, blaming Lord Wellesley for failing them in the hour of need by refusing to speak, though he voted on their side.

But in May 1812 Mr. Perceval was assassinated, and in the House of Commons a change of Ministry became necessary.

William, who was now Member for Portarlington, a pocket borough of his father-in-law's, had been offered a place in the Treasury by the Prince, but refused it because of his political opinions, in a letter to his father so diplomatically and yet so sincerely worded that it is possible to imagine that his mother might have been at his elbow as he wrote.

She was very unhappy about him, for her love told her more about his troubled spirit than even

his confidences, though he gave them to her fully. Perhaps he enclosed the letter to his father in the one he wrote her on the same date. This gave his views very fully and he may have sent the other for her approval. To his father William wrote from Brocket :

26th Feb. 1812.

MY DR. FATHER,

I have considered yr. communc. which you have this mornng. made to me by command of his R.H. the P[rince] R[egent] of yr. gracious offer of a seat either now or at some future time at the present board of Treasury. For his R.H. recollection of me upon this occasion, for the flattering expressions he has been pleased to use, as well as for his condescending kindness which I have experienced during the whole course of my life, I entreat that you will humbly lay at his R.H. feet my most grateful & dutiful acknowledgments. H.R.H. will not I trust think that I intrude if I request you further respectfully to assure his R.H. of my sincere attachment to his Person, of my anxiety for the success of his Government & of my zeal in support of that Governt. whensoever such support shall be in my opinion consistent with my duty to my Country. It would be in the highest degree indiscreet & presumptuous in me to obtrude upon his R.H. anything so insignificant as my opinion upon public affairs—it will be sufficient to observe that upon all the great questions of foreign & domestic policy except upon the question of the War in Spain & Portugal my opinion has either been expressed or manifested



directly in Oppn. to the system upon which his R.H. present Minirs. have conducted, & still profess to conduct the affairs of the country. In respectfully, under such circumstances, declining the offer made to me I throw myself with confidence upon H.R.H. own proper & generous feelings for my justification & I hope I am not too bold if I venture further to request you to add that from my knowledge of these feelings I anticipate an agreement with me in the conclusion that were I with such opinions to accede to any proposition of this nature I should by acting agst. my conscience render myself unworthy of serving H.R.H. & by degrading my character deprive myself for ever of the power of rendering to my country any efficient service. It only remains for me to request you to assure H.R.H. that his injunctions of secrecy shall be punctually obeyed."

And to his mother from the same place :

*From the Hon. Wm. Lamb to (the Viscountess Melbourne)*

I am very much obliged to you for your letter, & think that you are probably right in supposing that the Prince is more anxious to strengthen the Ministry than the Ministry are to strengthen themselves. He is, however, wrong in his notion, for the more parties a Ministry is composed of, the weaker it is and the more likely to break in the places where it is spliced. The name of Canning and Huskisson is something, but I have no opinion that the present Cabinet will hold long together after they have been introduced into it. It will go on much better and more surely as it stands at present. I can

hardly believe that such an arrangement, as you mention in the beginning of your letter was ever in contemplation—it is hardly possible that Ld. Sidmouth should consent to give up his present office & return again to the Presidentship of the Council & still more unlikely, that he should allow Ld. Buckingham to be turned out, for whom he has always fought a stout battle; but however all this is of no importance now. I think with you that the Ministers themselves are for having no change & they are right; the Prince's fears & anxieties may force one upon him, but like all other fears, they will overshoot themselves & perhaps bring about the very event which he most dreads.

William's seat at Portarlington was not very secure. His mother could not persuade him to take an interest in the future. George wrote to her from Durham on August 5, 1812:

“Without William means to visit his constituents to some purpose he had better not venture out of England this year, for any success in Spain or Russia will certainly produce an instant dissolution of Parliament.”

William seems to have contemplated this event, but in a letter to his mother from Ireland, where he and his wife were staying with the Bessboroughs, he said that for want of money he could not stand again. Should there be a dissolution his mother knew in any case he was unlikely to be elected, owing to the speech he made in the

House in favour of the Prince's unfettered Regency, which would be interpreted as against Catholic Emancipation.

*To the Viscountess Melbourne, Whitehall, London,  
from the Hon. Wm. Lamb*

LISMORE.

*September thirty 1812.*

I sent you back Frederic's letters from Bessborough some time ago, & wrote to you at that time fully upon that subject, as well as upon the dissolution of Parliament. The latter, I apprehend, has by this time taken place, the signs of such an event are more sure, than of any other. When it is very generally rumoured upon good authority, that there is to be a dissolution, depend upon it, it is then coming pretty quick,—as soon as it is certain, that it will take place, the next scheme is to deceive as much as possible about the exact time, & Becketts telling Giles, that it would be delayed until the first week in October was a strong reason for believing that it would be before the end of September. The reasons of all this are obvious. Ministers lose their advantage, if they delay the step long after it is publicly known, that they have determined upon it, & they in some measure puzzle and delude their adversaries by creating uncertainty with respect to the Moment. You say that it is a thousand pities that I have not contrived to make some interest somewhere. You know from my former letter, which by this time you have probably received, my sentiments upon this subject. It is impossible that any Body can feel the being out of Parliament more keenly for me than I feel it for myself. It is actually cutting

my throat. It is depriving me of the great object of my life at the moment, that I was near its attainment, & what is more, at a period when I cannot well turn myself to any other course or pursuit. But I have no money. I am embarrassed to a certain degree by circumstances which I am willing to explain. My income is insufficient, I am deprived of many things which I wish to have, & in many things in which I might be facilitated, I receive no assistance. Under these circumstances, I have long since determined not to diminish my own income one halfpenny—in justice to myself I cannot do it. I cannot expect my Father to bear the whole burthen, & even if he were willing to take it upon himself, I do not know whether I could justify to myself the suffering a further debt to be accumulated upon my account, which must in the end lead to serious embarrassment & to the further dismemberment of the property. This is the state of the case. I might add a hundred minor considerations to fortify the case, but these are the opinions which have led me to form a resolution which I do not name too strongly, when I call it my public ruin, but to which I do not see how I could avoid coming. I write in the dark so cannot add any more at present.

Yours ever dutifully & affectionately,

WM. LAMB.

Lady Holland had written to Lady Melbourne asking her if anything could be done for William, and Lady Melbourne wrote thanking her and saying :

“ Thank you very much Ldy. Holland for both

yr. Letters & for sending me Mr. Tierney's note ; there is no use in thinking about a person who will not think for themselves. I have a letter fr. William this morning, who says he fully expected a dissolution, that he has no money nor no views & that he feels extremely glad that he has nothing to do with St. Albans as it would infallibly have ruin'd him. I believe on ye contrary that he might have come in for very little money & kept it at a small expence."

Lady Holland had evidently, for the sake of the Whig Party and of the woman who had been one of the first to visit her and make her position in London easier, tried again, but Lady Melbourne's reply was bitter and disappointing :

"It is quite impossible for me to answer yr. question. Ld. M. would do anything in his power to assist William, but to prove to you how impossible it is for us to know how to set about it I will copy some part of a letter I received from William yesterday " ;

and she quoted the letter printed above, adding for herself :

"Now my opinion is, that all this is *nonsense*, & so I shall tell him. But I do not see at ye same time, how I can act in contradiction to sentiments so decidedly express'd. I shall be in as I wrote you word yesterday, on Friday eve<sup>g</sup> & I should notwithstanding all this, like to know if there is a possibility of doing anything—& still more to have some further conversation with you when



I could explain everything much better. I have great confidence in yr. kindness Dear Ly. Holland, to have already tired you with this long letter."

The Marquess of Wellesley, who had joined Perceval's Cabinet in 1809, resigned in 1812. He was Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and disapproved of the want of support his brother Sir Arthur Wellesley received in the conduct of the Peninsular War. He also disapproved of the Regent's persistent refusal to hear anything about a Bill for Catholic Emancipation.

His full statement on this subject was probably communicated to Lady Melbourne, and was found among her papers :

LORD WELLESLEY'S STATEMENT ON HIS  
RESIGNING THE SEALS

19th Feby. 1812

Ld. Wellesley expressed his intention to resign, because his general opinions for a long time past on various important questions had not sufficient weight to justify him towards the Public, or towards his own Character in continuing in Office, and because he had no hope of obtaining from the Cabinet, (as then constituted) a greater portion of attention than he had already experienced.

Lord Wellesley's objections to remaining in the Cabinet, arose, in a great degree, from the *narrow* & imperfect scale, on which the efforts in the Peninsula were conducted. It was always stated to him by Mr. Perceval, that it was *im-*

*practicable* to *enlarge* that system. The Cabinet followed Mr. Perceval implicitly. Ld. Wellesley thought that it was *perfectly practicable to extend* the Plan in the Peninsula & that it was neither safe nor honest towards this Country or the Allies to continue the present contracted scheme. No hope existed of converting Mr. Perceval, or any of his Colleagues; no alternative, therefore, remained for Ld. Wellesley but to resign, or to be the Instrument of a System, which he never advised, & which he could not approve.

Ld. Wellesley had repeatedly, with great reluctance, yielded his opinions to the Cabinet on many other important points. He was sincerely convinced by experience that, in every such instance, he had submitted to opinions more incorrect than his own, and had sacrificed, to the object of accommodation & temporary harmony more than he could justify in point of strict public duty. In fact, he was convinced by experience, that the Cabinet neither possessed ability, nor knowledge to devise a good plan; nor temper and discernment to *adopt* what he now thought necessary unless Mr. Perceval should concur with Ld. Wellesley. To Mr. Perceval's judgment, or attainments, Ld. Wellesley (under the same experience) could not pay any deference, without injury to the Public Service. With these views and sentiments, on the [*blank in MS.*] of January, Ld. Wellesley merely desired permission to withdraw from the Cabinet, not requiring any change in his own situation, and imploring no other favour than the facility of resignation.

This plain request was notified to the Prince Regent & to Mr. Perceval as nearly as possible at the same moment of time, with the expression

of Ld. Wellesley's wish that the precise time of his resignation might be accommodated to the pleasure of his Royal Highness, & to the convenience of Mr. Perceval, as soon as the Restrictions should expire. The P. Rt. received this notification with many gracious expressions of regret, & Mr. Perceval *in writing*, used expressions of regret, & also of *thanks* for the manner, in which Ld. W. had signified his wish to resign.

Mr. Perceval *without* any communication to Ld. W. instantly attempted to induce the P. Rt. to remove him before the expiration of the restrictions & repeatedly urged the attempt with great earnestness, severally proposing Ld. Castle-reagh, Lord Moira, & Ld. Sidmouth or some of his party to supersede Ld. W., without an hour of delay. *Mr. P. never gave any intimation* to Ld. W. of these proceedings, nor even of his wish for Lord W.'s immediate retirement.

The P.R. still pressing Ld. W. to retain the Seals, he submitted to His Royal Highness's commd. declaring at the same time his anxious desire to be liberated as soon as his R.H. should establish his Government.

When it appeared, at the expiration of the restrictions that the P. Rt. intended to continue Mr. P.'s Government, Ld. W. again tendered the Seals to His R.H. with encreased earnestness : on that occasion, being informed, that H.R.H. was still at liberty, & was resolved to form his Cabinet, according to H.R.H. own views, and being *commanded to state his opinions* on the subject, Ld. W. declared, that in his judgment, the Cabinet ought to be formed *first* on an intermediary principle respecting the Roman Catholic claims, equally exempt from the extremes of

instant, unqualified concession, & of peremptory, eternal exclusion, and *secondly* on an understanding that the War should be conducted with adequate vigor. Ld. W. said that he personally was ready to serve *with* Mr. P. on such a Basis; that he never again would serve *under* Mr. P. in any circumstances. He said that he would serve under Ld. Moira or Ld. Holland on the proposed principle, but that he desired no office, & entertained no other wish, than to be instrumental in forming such an Administration for the P. Rt. as should be consistent with H.R.H.'s honor, conciliatory towards Ireland, and equal to the conduct of the War, on a scale of *sufficient extent*. He made no exception to any Prime Minister but Mr. P., whom he considered to be incompetent to fill that office, although sufficiently qualified for inferior stations. He offered to act under any other person approved by H.R.H., but he stated that his own views rendered him much more anxious to resign instantly.

The P. Rt. commanded Ld. W. to continue until H.R.H. should have communicated with Mr. P. through the Ld. Chancellor. Ld. W. stated, that such a communication must prove useless, but submitted to H.R.H. earnest desire; in two days afterwards, Ld. W. received through the Ld. Chancellor, the P. Rt.'s acceptance of his resignation, & accordingly delivered the Seals to H.R.H. on the 19th Feby. 1812.

## CHAPTER VII

### FAMILY AND POLITICAL TROUBLES

THE true secret of Lady Melbourne's trouble was that she knew that William's carelessness about his career and distaste for public life were the results of the unhappiness of his home. For some time after her marriage and after the birth of Augustus, Caroline had seemed content with her home and her husband, but in 1810 Lady Melbourne's life was complicated by the fact that her daughter-in-law was indulging in very open flirtations, and that they were carried not only beyond the bounds of prudence but also of good breeding. The views then taken of the sanctity of the marriage vow were lax, and divorce not infrequent. But Lady Melbourne, who had managed her own life with great perspicuity, had no wish to spoil the even tenor of her social way by a divorce in her family.

William was easygoing and in love with his wife. Lady Melbourne feared that divorce might be the least of the evils to dread. The growing indecorum of a daughter-in-law under the very eyes of her husband and as it were under his



protection would be very undesirable. So with her usual acumen she spoke first to the wife, and spoke to the point. We can see the interview between them—the stately woman, mature but still beautiful and with a clear brain and mind, trained in worldly wisdom by her long experience of the world, and the wild daughter-in-law, partly from affection, partly in defiance, flattering and cajoling her “dear, dearest Lady Melbourne.” The latter received the flattery; expressed her regret that she had been unjust in her surmises. She, however, continued to watch her daughter-in-law, with the result that shortly afterwards she wrote to her a contemptuous letter, beginning—

“I only write you a few lines for the purpose of preventing yr. coming to me loaded with falsehood & flattery under the impression that it will have any effect—which I most solemnly assure you it will not. I see you have no shame nor no compunction for yr. past conduct. I lament it but as I can do no good I shall withdraw myself and suffer no more vexations upon your acct. Yr. behaviour last night was so disgraceful in its appearance & so disgusting from its motives that it is quite impossible it should ever be effaced from my mind. When anyone braves the opinion of the World, sooner or later they will feel the consequences of it & altho at first people may have excused your forming friendships with all those who are censured for their conduct, from yr. youth & inexperience yet when they see you continue to single them out & to overlook all the decencies imposed by Society—they will look

upon you as belonging to the same class. Had you been sincere in yr. promises of amendment or wished to make any return to Wm. for his kindness—you would have discarded and driven from yr. presence any persons or things that could remind you of the unworthy object for whose sake you had run such risks & exposed yourself so much, but on the contrary you seem to delight in everything that recalls him to you & to nourish & foster those disgraceful feelings which have caused so much unhappiness to those who ought to be dearest to you. A Married Woman should consider that by such levity she not only compromises her own honor & character but also that of her Husband—but you seek only to please yourself—You think you can blind yr. Husband and cajole yr. friends.

“ Only one word more—*let me alone. I will have no more* conversations with you upon this hateful subject. I repeat it, let me alone, & do not drive me to explain the motives of the cold civility that will from henceforward pass between us.”

This letter brought a flood of confession from Lady Caroline. Sir Godfrey had given her a bracelet; he had given her a dog, and the dog had flown at her little son Augustus, who she worshipped. Perhaps the dog was mad, and through her conduct she might have killed her child. So she raved, swearing to her “ dear, her dearest Lady Melbourne, who had been more than mother to her,” that she recognized her faults, and would never see Sir Godfrey again. But at the end of one of these letters she describes William

as a husband in terms that many a young husband would do well to take to heart :

“ God knows I am humiliated enough, & did not expect I should ever act in this manner. Some heads may bear perfect happiness & perfect liberty, mine cannot, & those principles which I came to William with—that horror of vice, of deceit, of any thing that was the least improper, that Religion which I believed in then, without a doubt & with what William pleased to call superstitious enthusiasm—merited praise, & ought to have been cherished—they were safeguards to a character like mine & nobody can tell the almost childish innocence & inexperience I had preserved till then. All at once this was thrown off, & William himself though still unconscious of what he has done, William himself taught me to regard without horror all the forms & restraints I had laid so much stress on. With his excellent heart, sight, head & superior mind he might, & will go on with safety without them—he is superior to those passions & vanities which mislead weaker characters, & which, however I may be ashamed to own it, are continually misleading me. He called me Prudish, said I was straight-laced—amused himself with instructing me in things I need never have heard or known & the disgust I at first felt to the world’s wickedness I till then had never heard of in a very short time gave way to a general laxity of principles which, little by little, unperceived by you all, has been undermining the few virtues I ever possessed.”

The household of Melbourne House was con-

ducted on the plan pursued by the great families of Italy in their palaces. Lady Melbourne seems to have given up the first floor to the Lambs on their marriage, and she and Lord Melbourne lived on the ground floor. Little Augustus had his nursery at the top of the house, for Miss Berry tells us how Lady Caroline dragged her there to show her the baby she was so proud of. Lady Melbourne continued to receive the great world at her routs and receptions, but Lady Caroline had her own receptions also, and Lady Sarah Spencer, afterwards Lady Lyttleton, describes a party given at Melbourne House by Lady Caroline in 1812, which lasted till three in the morning. The guests of Lady Melbourne, who she entertained in her own apartment downstairs, included Sheridan and the Prince of Wales. Sheridan was very drunk, and the supper party did not break up till six.

William was more cheerful ; and his interest in politics revived. His wife for the moment had given up her flirtations, and was suffering from a violent fit of remorse. Lady Melbourne seized the opportunity to advise him to have a talk with Mr. Daniel Giles, the Member for St. Albans in the county of Hertford, with a view to standing for the Borough at the next general election. She assured William that Mr. Giles was quite willing to give up the seat to him, and was aware that he was only keeping it warm for the Lambs and advised him to call on Mr. Giles as early as possible.



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Mr. Giles of Youngsbury, Hertfordshire, was a pleasant bachelor of fifty, very popular in the County Society, when he was required to act in the Whig interest. When nothing was wanted of him he was treated in the same manner as Tierney was by the aristocratic Whigs and spoken of rather contemptuously as “the Hertfordshire Brewer.” Mr. Giles may have heard this. He was a determined man, and when William in September 1811, instigated probably by Lady Melbourne, discussed with Mr. Giles the advisability of replacing him as Member for St. Albans, Mr. Giles, furious at being looked upon as a mere warming-pan, quoted Lady Melbourne’s admiration of his popularity to William, who repeated it to his mother, and the result was a letter of dignified denial of Mr. Giles’ statements :

*From Lady Melbourne to Mr. Giles*

*Sept. 1911.*

Ever since I have been informed of the discussion, for I will not call it dispute, going on between you & Wm. respecting St. Albans, it has been my determination to keep myself entirely aloof & not to give any opinion on the subject—but since you have chosen to bring me forward in yr. last letter to William I think it only fair to state to you what I must say to anyone who questions me, respecting the compliments you say I paid you upon yr. great strength & great popularity at St. Albans. I must in fairness answer that I have not the least recollection of having done so. I don’t mean to say that it is



not true, because I now think it very probable that you may recall it to my memory by some circumstances connected with it, but really at the present I cannot remember it or anything like it. [“& I have been in the way of knowing so little about St. Albans except from you”—*struck out*] that it appears odd to me how such a fact [“circumstance” “the only thing”—*struck out*]. The last time I recollect having mentioned St. Albans to you was when I told you that I had heard you found fault with Jedmund [?] having given voters an Election Dinner, & yr. answer to me was that it was a difficult thing to do as some of those who thought they had a right to partake of it, were not thought proper company for the others & I [“then” *struck out*] sd. then you ought to give two dinners. I mention this as the only thing I can remember except that at the time of the Election you often stated tht. you had no intention of making an interest for yourself, & that what you were then doing William would profit by at some time, & you never have since yt. hinted to me that you had changed your intentions in this respect. This last part I have mentioned to no-one [“but yourself” *struck out*] but I thought it fair to tell you what I must say if I am in any way referr’d to. I hate any dispute & hope you will both settle this amicably.

But Mr. Giles had a good memory, and reminded her among other matters of a walk he had taken with her and Lord Melbourne to call on Mrs. Fitzherbert and others. To be seen walking in this company must have been sweet to “the

Hertfordshire Brewer.” We can imagine Lady Melbourne in her plumed hat and her sweeping skirts leaning on her husband’s arm, but only because it was the fashion of the day—no woman needed a husband’s support less than Lady Melbourne. Giles was shrewd enough to let her see that though his offer to stand down from St. Albans in favour of her sons before the last election had been refused, he had heard that she had privately made inquiries as to the popularity of the sitting Members. She received a letter from him :

DEAR LADY MELBOURNE,

I am extremely vexed with myself for having introduced you into the unfortunate discussions existing between me & William & had I foreseen that the referring to the conversation in question would have had that effect I should certainly have abstained from mentioning a circumstance the aid of which the ground I stand upon does not appear to me to require. But having brought it forward I must endeavour to recall it to your recollection though I may possibly fail from the observation having been made in an accidental and short conversation which perhaps *I* should not have remembered had not the impression of it been fixed by other circumstances.

The precise time in the last spring I cannot state but you may perhaps recollect my walking with you & Lord Melbourne from Whitehall through the Park *I think* to St. James’s & then to Mrs. Fitzherbert’s & Lady Sefton’s. During

part of the time some fourth person was with us but who I cannot at this moment recollect. We were all walking together in the Mall opposite the wall of Carlton House. The termination of the Parliament was talked of & some observation was made by the fourth person about St. Albans & the chance of an opposition there. I said I was very safe or something to that effect & you then observed to me that I was very strong and popular there & in a manner that made an impression upon me from my having then lately heard that a sort of enquiry had been making respecting the strength of Halsey & me & other probable candidates. I do not know that you were acquainted with this & only mention it to account for my perfect recollection of your expression. At the same time it is not my wish to press into this discussion any circumstance that may be thought doubtful, & if the detail I have given does not bring it back to your mind it would be more satisfactory to me to consider the allusion to it as expunged from my letter to William.

The conversation respecting the Dinners was I believe exactly as you state it but this was long anterior to that which I have referred to.

With respect to what was said at the time of or rather previous to the Election you cannot fail to recollect that under an apprehension that my return if obtained would not stand good, I strongly pressed the advantage of my retiring from the Poll in favor of Frederic or George & urged that in such case William might secure the seat for a future occasion. This you know was not approved of & I was of course bound to stand the hazard of the contest. It turned out favour-

ably, and I obtained the seat but most assuredly not according to my understanding as a mere tenant for another, though as I have already said, if the application had been made to me at an earlier period I should without difficulty have given way to William & instead of cultivating an interest & making engagements on my own account should have readily co-operated with him in preparing the way for his future success.

I forbear from entering more fully into the subject because I do not wish to engage you in it or to use arguments to influence your opinion. It is very painful to me to have to discuss such a question at all & there is not anything I so much deprecate as the hazard of interrupting the friendship you have long honoured me with & which I shall always feel for you and your family.

B. King delivered me your message & I hope it will not be long before I have the pleasure of coming to you at Brocket. We shall probably meet on the 16th at Hatfield. Believe me,

My dear Lady Melbourne,

Most faithfully &

respectfully yours

DANL. GILES.

YOUNGBURY,

*Sept. 11th, 1811.*

Whether Mr. Giles met Lady Melbourne at Hatfield does not appear, but there is a slight threat contained in his mention of the visit to the Tory stronghold. It is more than probable, if Lady Melbourne did meet him there, that she devoted herself so much to him and brought him forward

so frequently that he entirely forgot the past incident.

But it was impossible for the wild and wayward nature of William's wife to control for long her strange and poisoned impulses. It had been in 1812, according to Mr. Vere Foster,<sup>1</sup> that Lady Caroline's attachment to Byron began. True to her character, the attachment and admiration speedily turned to a violent infatuation, and she exhibited her feelings in a most extravagant way. Lord Byron was also Lady Melbourne's friend and came often to the house to talk to one whom he considered not only the wisest but also one of the most charming women. "Had she been a few years younger," he wrote, "what havoc might she not have wrought in my affections!" There was therefore no difficulty in Lady Caroline meeting him not only in the world but at home in a natural and easy manner. The state of affairs must have made Lady Melbourne very anxious, and the position almost impossible. Lady Caroline was a difficult inmate in a house—one of her vagaries was to surround herself with a number of pages, whom she alternately beat and caressed. One she hurt most severely, and on seeing the blood screamed—"Oh God, I have killed the page!" The pages were an unusual

<sup>1</sup> Vere Foster, youngest son of Sir Augustus Foster and grandson of Lady Elizabeth Foster.



and rather mediæval element in the households of that time, and they were probably very unpopular with the old and tried servants of the stately and orderly house. Lady Melbourne must have felt that Lady Caroline was becoming intolerable and yet was better under her roof than in a house of her own.

One morning, early in August 1812, Lady Caroline, who had lately been even more wild and eccentric than usual in her behaviour, was visited by her mother Lady Bessborough, who tried to persuade her to come to Roehampton, and remain quietly with her father and mother till William Lamb could join them, and they could all go to Ireland together. While Lady Bessborough was there, Lord Melbourne came in and spoke severely to Lady Caroline on her behaviour, which he said was becoming intolerable. The latter lost her temper and replied so rudely and impertinently that Lady Bessborough flew to call Lady Melbourne. She appeared instantly, but in that moment Lady Caroline was gone so swiftly that even the porter could not stop her.

Her mother drove up and down Parliament Street, hoping she would return. Lady Caroline had completely disappeared. When Lady Bessborough returned, Lord Melbourne admitted that she had threatened him that she would go to Lord Byron, and he had bid her "go and be damned."

Lady Melbourne immediately accompanied Lady Bessborough to Lord Byron's house, but

found him alone and as much astonished as they were. Lord Byron promised to try and find her. He received through a hackney coachman a packet of letters from Lady Caroline for Lady Bessborough, and sent them to the latter at Devonshire House, where she was dining, and then by promises and bribes induced the coachman to tell him where Lady Caroline was and take him to her.

Lord Byron found her in a surgeon's house in Kensington, where she had taken refuge, and having forced his way in told the surgeon that he was the lady's brother, and brought her almost by force to her mother in Cavendish Square, from where he persuaded her to return to the Melbournes in Whitehall. William promised to receive her and forgive her, and Lady Melbourne seems to have met her half-way with kindness and affection. Lady Caroline was touched, and Lady Bessborough, broken-hearted and ill, drove home to seek peace and quiet in Cavendish Square. How she reached her home, Mrs. Petersen, probably the housekeeper or Lady Bessborough's maid, told Lady Caroline, with her faithful heart filled with indignation ; she took the precaution of enclosing her letter in one to Lady Melbourne, saying :

“ Madam, we was all most dreadfully allarm'd last night at Lady Bessbro being found at the bottom of her Carriage in a fit with great difficulty the footmen got her out & oh Madam think of my Horror when I saw her poor mouth

all on one side & her face cold as marble we was all distracted she continued senseless for a length of time we got Mr. Walker & thank God she by degrees got better—but indeed if she is to undergo many more such very miserable days as the few last have been it will Quite Kill her. I have written to Lady Caroline but fear she is lost to all feeling even for such a Mother. I am your Ladyships Dutyful servant J. H. Petersen.

“Madam, I inclose Lady Caroline’s letter to you for I have said many severe things to her but as I do not know what state of mind & body she may be in this morning I leave it to Your Ladyship to give it to her or not as you think proper. J. H. P.”

*J. H. P[etersen to Lady Caroline Lamb]*

Cruel & unnatural as you have behaved you surely do not wish to be the Death of your Mother. I am sorry to say you last night nearly succeeded in doing so. She had fallen in a Fit at the bottom of her Carriage & with the utmost difficulty her footmen got her out. Oh, Lady Caroline could you have seen her at that moment you surely would have been convinced how wickedly you are going on. She was perfectly senseless & her poor mouth Drawn all on one side & cold as Marble we was all distracted even her footmen cryed out *Shame* on you for alas you have exposed yourself to all London you are the talk & [*sic*] every Groom & footman about the Town. A few months ago it was Sir Godfrey & now another has turnd your Head & made you forget what a Husband you have what an angel Child besides makeing you torture all your kind relations & friends in the most cruel manner.

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Your poor Father two was heart broken at seeing the wretched state you had reduced your Mother two we got Mr. Walker quick as Possible & thank God she is better—Lord Bessbro would not let me send for you he said the sight of you would make her worse. You have for many months taken every means in your Power to make your Mother miserable & you have perfectly succeeded but do not quite kill her—you will one day or other fataly *feel* the wickedness of your present conduct. Oh Lady Caroline pray to God for streanth of mind & resolution to behave as you ought for this is Dreadful.

[J. H. PETERSEN.]

2 CAVENDISH Sq.,

*Monday.*

I feel by sending you this I offend you for ever but I cannot help it.

The publicity of what had happened made it most desirable that Lady Caroline should leave London. William had forgiven her and, no doubt for the sake of appearances, went away with her, and they joined her father and mother, Lord and Lady Bessborough, who were going to spend some months at their home in Ireland.

Before they started Lady Bessborough saw the Prince Regent, and wrote to Lady Melbourne:

“Now could you imagine, Dear Ly. M., that I had spoken to the P[rince] of Ld. Byr.—he began about my going to Ireland & then told me the whole history of Caro . . . saying Ld. Mel:



had been with him very much out of humour complaining that she drove him mad, & *we* were almost as bad, that Ld. Byr. had bewitch'd the whole family Mothers & daughter & all & that nothing would satisfy us but making a fool of him as well as of ourselves, & insisting on his asking Ld. Byn. to his house. The P. said all this so rapidly & so loudly (?), interrupting himself now & then to exclaim, 'I never heard of such a thing in my life—taking the Mothers for confidantes! What would you have thought of my going to talk to Ly. Spencer in former times!'—that in spite of the subject & the circle I was near laughing. But do not scold Ld. Mel., for he was so very good naturd & so civil that I was quite delighted with him. I could not get away from Ld. Byr., when once he began talking to me—he was part of the time very pleasant & talking of other things—but he did tell me some things so terrifying & so extraordinary!! To be sure if he does mean to deceive he takes the strangest way of doing it I ever knew—unless a shocking notion the P. has, can be true—but I do think it impossible it is too diabolick.

“God bless you.”

Lady Melbourne saw them go with a heavy heart. The journey might be the salvation of Lady Caroline, though Lady Melbourne cherished few illusions now about her daughter-in-law's character. But it meant a blank space in William's career, and he was far away from her influence.

She was left alone. She wrote to Lord Byron, reproaching him for the sorrow he had caused.



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The answer when it came surprised even her, accustomed as she was to the turns of Fortune's wheel. She now had the skein in her own hands to unravel, and confident in her powers felt that Fortune had indeed been very kind. Byron wrote to say that his affections were not fixed where she supposed, and that the lady of his choice was Lady Melbourne's own niece, Annabella Milbanke, daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke and Judith Noel his wife, daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas Wentworth Noel.

### *Lord Byron to Lady Melbourne*

*Sepr. 13th, 1812.*

You are all out as to my real Sentiments. I was, am, & shall be I fear, attach'd to another, who is I am informed engaged therefore entirely out of my reach. I have never sd. much to her but have never lost sight of her.

As I have sd. so much I may as well say all—the Woman I mean is M[iss] M[ilbanke]. I know nothing of her fortune, & I am told her Father is not rich, but my own would when my Rochdale arranges. are closed be sufficient for both—my Debts are not 25,000 pd. & the deuce is in it, if with Rochdale & the surplus of Newstead I could not contrive to be as independent as half the Peerage. I know little of her, & have not the most distant reason to suppose that I am at all a favourite in that quarter, but I never saw a Woman whom I liked esteemed & could love so much—but that chance is gone, & I had better not think of her.

*Sepr. 19th.* Miss M. I admire, & as I said

in my last could love if she would let me, still I cannot believe what you say, that she is not engaged to E. I have been assured of the contrary, by such good authority. *Aunts* are not trusted on such subjects. M. M. is a clever Woman an Amiable Woman, & of high Blood, for I have still a few Norman & Scotch inherited prejudices on that score. Whatever you may think, I assure you I have a very domestick turn, & should wish to be married to a Woman whom I could love & esteem & in whom I could place the greatest confidence. Such is M. M. she always reminds me of “Emma” in the Modern Griselda & whom ever I may marry, that is the Woman I should wish to have married—it is odd enough that my acquaintance with Ly. C[owper] commenced with a confidence on my part about yr. Neice.

28th *Sepr.* I have always openly professed my admiration of yr. neice & have ever been anxious to cultivate her acquaintance but Ly. C[owper] told me she was engaged to E. [unknown] so did several others. Mrs. [George] L[amb] her great friend talk’d in the same strain & was moreover certain that E. would make the best Husband in the world. Under these circumstances I withdrew, & wish’d not to hazard my Heart, with a Woman I was so extremely inclined to Love but at the same time sure could be nothing to me. The case is now different—& upon hearing from a friend of hers that they are coming here, I have put off my journey to Rochdale—and sent my Agent to settle some Business of importance without me. If you should have any means of introducing me to their Society, pray do. I have trusted you with my

secret and am entirely in your power. I do not care about her fortune, & should be happy if the floating capital of which I am now Master, could by some arrangements turn out to be advantageous to both. Does Miss M. *waltz*?—it is an odd question—but a very essential point with me. I wish I had any hopes that it would be possible for me to make myself agreeable to her, but my fears predominate,—& will I am sure give me a very awkward appearance. I wish you would undertake to say a few words for me—could you not say that I wish to propose, but I have great doubts of her.

Excuse my asking this favour but you have always been so kind to me that I trust to your being my friend in this case. Everything rests with M. M. herself for my earnest wish is to devote my whole life to her.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE AMAZING MARRIAGE

HISTORY says that Lord Byron consulted Lady Melbourne on the choice of a wife. His letter just quoted does not give the impression of being the culmination of a series of conversations. It comes like a bolt from the blue. Lady Melbourne, who loved success, would never have proposed Annabella Milbanke as a wife for Lord Byron, but when he suggested it, and moreover said his heart was involved, Lady Melbourne felt that she had every right to endeavour to bring about the marriage. She knew that Lord Byron was not really in love with Lady Caroline, that indeed she had begun to bore him. Lord Byron's marriage might deliver William from the danger of another scandal such as he had just experienced.

Anne Isabella Milbanke, to give her her true name, was born in 1792. She was therefore about 20 when Byron first proposed marriage with her. When young she was described as "pretty not beautiful, the prevalent expression of her countenance is ingenuousness," and later the same writer says "what she may have lost in regular beauty, she made up in variety and

expression of countenance during conversation.” George Hayter’s miniature of her painted in 1812 showed that she had beautiful long curling hair. She was engaging and clever; she talked well and wrote rather pompously. She had evidently not only a deep affection for her aunt Melbourne, but a great belief in her judgment. She had already been sought in marriage by a mysterious “E.” and others. Elizabeth Duchess of Devonshire, whose son Sir Augustus Foster had been greatly attracted by Annabella, wrote to a friend :

“ Letters have passed which have put an end to our hopes on that subject. She is so odd a girl—in short she is good amiable and sensible, but cold, prudent & reflecting. Lord Byron makes up to her a little, but she don’t seem to admire him, except as a poet, nor he her, except as a wife.”

Lady Melbourne after receiving Lord Byron’s letter must have decided that the diplomatic way to approach its subject was to ask Annabella what qualities she required in a husband. Poor Annabella described her own nature—and then that of the ideal she had created as a husband. She wrote :

DEAR AUNT,

On the opposite side you will find what I promised—do not forget *your part*.

It is so difficult to speak of oneself exactly as one means, that I think you might mistake the



account I gave of my defects of temper. As I do not wish you to think *worse* of me than I deserve, I will try to explain myself more correctly.

I am never irritated except when others are so, and then I am too apt to imitate them. This makes good temper in my companions very necessary for my peace, and if I am not disturbed by others in this way I have not any disposition to disturb them. I am never sulky, but my spirits are easily depressed, particularly by seeing anybody unhappy.

What I call *my Romance* is this—that if I had not acquired the habit of reflecting before I act, I should sometimes have sacrificed considerations of prudence to the impulse of my feelings—but I am not conscious of ever having *yielded* to the temptation which assailed me. I can assure you *from experience* that I am very thankfully submissive to correction so tell me when I am wrong.

Yours affectly. [A. I. MILBANKE].

On the “opposite side” she wrote as follows :

“*husband.*

“He must have consistent principles of Duty governing strong & *generous* feelings, and reducing them under the command of Reason.

“Genius is not in my opinion *necessary*, though desirable, *if united* with what I have just mentioned.

“I require a freedom from suspicion, & from *habitual* ill-humour—also an equal tenor of affection towards me, not that violent attachment which is susceptible of sudden encrease or diminution from trifles.

“ I wish to be considered by my husband as a *reasonable adviser*, not as a guide on whom he could *implicitly* depend.

“ So much for the chief requisites of *mind*, and for the sake of these I could overlook many imperfections in other respects. In regard to *external* qualifications I would have fortune enough to enable me to continue without embarrassment in the kind of society to which I have been accustomed. I have no inclination to extravagance, and should be content to practise economy for the attainment of this object.

“ Rank is indifferent to me. *Good connections* I think an important advantage.

“ I do not regard *beauty*, but am influenced by the *manners of a gentleman*, without which I scarcely think that any one could attract me.

“ I would not enter into a family where there was a strong tendency to *Insanity*.”

Lady Melbourne asked for more details on receiving this letter. Annabella explained herself more thoroughly, and admitted she had an irritable temper :

*Miss A. I. M[ilbanke] to Lady Melbourne*

I thank you most warmly for the trouble you have taken which will be of great use to me. I wish to make some remarks on parts of your very kind letter & comments.

I am so deeply sensible of the mischievous consequences that would ensue from want of temper were I married to a man of warm feelings (and I could not love one who had them not), that I have thought it a sufficient reason for

deferring matrimony. I should at present occasion disappointment to a husband who expected to find me possessed of constant self-command & composure. I most fully agree with you in thinking a reciprocation of Passion highly culpable and absurd—it is therefore my constant endeavour to practise self-government in my present slight trials in order to prepare my mind for enduring those I may hereafter encounter, in such a manner as will make myself & others happy. I have confessed that my good resolutions on this subject sometimes fail when their execution is most requisite, but as the failures become gradually *less frequent*, I hope I may without presumption look forward to the time when I shall *not* disappoint my husband. I do not exactly recollect in what way I gave myself credit for Controuling my feelings, but I think I must have applied it to those which border on Romance, not to my irritable dispositions, as I reproach myself so painfully for not having completely subdued the latter.

With this consciousness of my own deficiencies in what is so essential to the conduct of a good wife, I am not in danger of being dissatisfied because I do not find perfection. Believe me I have never imagined myself deserving of attachment from the best kind of *imperfect* characters, and on that account I did not venture to include in my demands some qualities which you justly consider very great advantages (as those of Talents & Chearfulness) because I would not be conceitedly unreasonable.

In some particulars you have not exactly estimated my meaning, which I cannot be surprised at when I consider the obscurity & in-

sufficiency of my statement owing to my wish for brevity. You are mistaken in thinking that I meant to dispense with the amiable feelings. I thought those of "good-nature, openness, frankness & kindness of heart" included under the term "generous" and if that expression was not correct, I cannot explain my meaning better than by those particular qualities which you have enumerated at the foundation of Love. So far from supposing that I could be attached by a character of *dry* Reason, and *cold* Rectitude, I am always *repelled* by people of that description.

With regard to the *Principles*, which I would have founded on a sense of religion, I thought that if they are *consistent* they cannot be *unsettled*, therefore that it is needless to add that they should be *fixed*. However you are very right in reproving vague expressions, and I should have made the sense less equivocal.

You say that with all these requisites "a man has my free leave to be obstinate, perverse, morose, sulky & ill-natured." How can these dispositions exist with the well-regulated good feelings which I mention in the first place? Besides I afterwards specify the absence of ill-humoured *habits*. If I had not thought this sufficient to secure the exclusion of such bad qualities as you describe I should have named them distinctly as objectionable.

After so full an explanation you will perhaps take off my *stilts*, and allow that I am only *on tiptoe*. I quite agree with what you say, and I am trying to show you that it agrees more nearly with what *I* said than you seem to suppose.

Most affecty. yours,

A. I. M.



She learnt then, if she had not known it before, that the husband to whom her aunt referred was Lord Byron. Annabella, having thought over the proposal most carefully, calmly and definitely wrote to her aunt and rejected it. She said that, much as she regretted the fact, she could not marry Lord Byron, because she was not in love with him. "La! how comical!" Lady Melbourne must have said to herself, "that my niece should be almost the only woman who knows him who can say that!"

"I do not give my answer without that serious deliberation which is due to the honourable and disinterested nature of Lord Byron's sentiments. I am convinced that he considers my happiness not less than his own, in the wishes which he has expressed to you, and I think of them with the sincerest gratitude.

"I endeavour not to yield to any decided preference till my judgment has been strengthened by longer observation, but I will not assign this as my only motive for declining the estimable and very uncommon advantages now offered. I should be totally unworthy of Lord Byron's esteem if I were not to speak the truth without equivocation. Believing that he never will be the object of that strong affection which would make me happy in domestic life, I should wrong him by any measure that might, even indirectly, confirm his present impressions. From my limited observations of his conduct, I was predisposed to believe your strong testimony in his favour, and I willingly attribute it more to the defect



of my own feelings than of his character that I am not inclined to return his attachment. After this statement which I make with real sorrow from the idea of its giving pain, I must leave our future intercourse to his judgment. I can have no reason for withdrawing from an acquaintance that does me honor and is capable of imparting so much rational pleasure, except the fear of involuntarily deceiving him. I cannot appear insensible to kindness, and its influence on my manner might lead him erroneously to suppose that I had a stronger interest. Whatever may be his determination from a full consideration of these circumstances, I shall acquiesce in it with an anxious wish that it may prove for his happiness.

“Perhaps the most satisfactory method of acquainting him with the contents of this letter would be to let him have it. I have too much confidence in his liberality, to think reserve or caution necessary in communicating my feelings. The generous delicacy of his whole conduct towards me, particularly when he acted from the false information of my engagement to another person, is one of many proofs that his principles of Honor deserve my entire reliance. I assure him of my perfect silence on this subject.

“RICHMOND,  
Oct. 12.”

Lord Byron kept up a frequent correspondence with Lady Melbourne at this time. She encouraged it, and was glad to hear the facts from both sides, for while he confided in Lady Melbourne she was also receiving the hysterical outpourings of Lady Caroline's heart. In one of Lady

Melbourne's letters to him, written in her mocking, teasing style on September 29, 1812, she mentions that Caroline had read a letter from Lord Byron intended for only Lady Melbourne's eye, and goes on to laugh at him for his praise of herself:

“ You are too suspicious, after all I have said, it makes me half angry—in one of yr. last Letters you hinted tht. perhaps I left yr. Letter in the way on purpose. These are your ‘wounding flouts’ and shew what those persons are to expect ‘that lye within the mercy of your Wit.’ I can not bear her having got that Letter whether she opened it, or found it, ’tis all one, it will be long before I forgive it, if it was either on my Table or in my Drawer, she has added falsehood to her other iniquities, for in that case she could not think it was for her. I have not been in right good humour since I heard it. What high flown compliments you have paid me, for Heaven's sake lower me to my proper level, or I shall be quite alarm'd when I see you again. I shall neither dare speak before you nor to you, & as to talking my usual nonsense that must be quite out of the question, or I shall soon drop from the Pinnacle where you have placed me. Do let me down easily, that I may not break my Bones by a sudden fall; What can you have in yr. Head? ‘Men of distinguish'd abilities’ ce sont des Hommes comme les autres, & I am a Woman comme les autres—superior in nothing. I happen fortunately to be gifted with a fund of good nature & chearfulness, & very great spirits—& have a little more *tact* than my neighbours, & people call me pleasant because I am always inclined in conversation to enter into the subjects that

seem most adapted to the taste of those with whom I happen to be—when they are not too high for aspiration (as Mr. Ward says) like some I have lately been with. You say ‘I admire you certainly as much as ever you were admired’ & a great deal more I assure you than ever I was admired in the *same way*. I may have been beloved—but Love is not admiration. Lovers admire of course without knowing why. Yours therefore is much *more flattering* as I sd. the other day—but you quite astonished me when I found your usual playfulness chang’d into such a formal *tirade*. I have hardly yet recover’d my surprise—now I have told you everything & have shown myself truly to you ; I can not see why you should wish that you had not known me. It can not lead to any regrets and if circumstances should not stop it entirely our Friendship will be very pleasant to both as any sentiment must be where all is sunshine—and where love does not introduce itself, there can be no jealousys, torments & quarrels. And should this catastrophe take place, it will, at least to me, always be a pleasing recollection, that we should have been *good friends* (there is something in tht. expression I like very much) if imperious circumstances had not prevented it. Once you told me you did not understand Friendship. I told you I would teach it you, & so I will, if you do not allow C. to take you quite away. Do you remember some verses of Voltaire’s where after lamenting tht. he was old, he says :

Du ciel alors daignant descendre  
 L’amitié vint à mon secours,  
 Elle étoit peut être aussi tendre  
 Mais moins vive que les amours.

“ I admire you extremely for your resolutions respecting *her* but Dr. Ld. B. you deceive yourself—you never will be able to keep them. What! pass your time in endeavouring to put her into good humour, & to satisfy her, & disguise from her that you are unhappy. Fine Dreams indeed—the first is much beyond yr. power & finding how ill you succeed, must inevitably prevent you from persisting in the last. Do not however mistake me, I would not have you say a harsh sentence to her for the World, or anything that could be deem’d insulting. I had not the least intention of advising you to do it; there is no kindness that I would not have you shew her, but sacrificing yourself to her would only be romantic, & not kind—for supposing the sentiments you express to me are real, it would be quite the contrary, for it must lead to unhappiness & misery. If a little trifling expression of coldness at present would prevent this *finale*, how much more kind, to give a little present pain, & avoid her total ruin; however I do not mean to give any advice, you probably know much better than I do, how to act. You may depend upon my giving you the earliest intelligence in my power of their return. I hear no mention of it yet—& if they come back thro’ holland which was their intention, we shall hear of their leaving Ireland a long time before they arrive here. I must however add that I think you attach too much blame to yourself—she was no novice & tho’ I give her credit for being what one must believe every Heroine of a Romance to be (except Made. Cottin’s) yet she knew enough to be upon her guard, & cannot be look’d upon as the Victim of a designing Man. All the world are of a very



different opinion—she always told me you continually sd. that she had exposed herself so much before she was acquainted with you, tht. her character could not suffer, as it was already gone—I abused you at the time for giving it this turn tho what you sd. was perfectly true, & in my opinion exculpates you entirely.

“Poor Annabella, her innocent Eyes will have to contend with the Black & probably experienced ones of yr. Innamorata. Recollect in the meantime how much they will improve *if* she should be in love with you, the others are acquernis [*sic*] & will be no better. Eyes require that sort of inspiration. Many people have fine Eyes who do not know what to do with them, many have nothing behind them, then it is hopeless. Mon cher Neveu, vous êtes bien changéant, much like the man in the farce we saw together (the Weathercock) do you recollect it? I thought then it was a character not to be found in nature, however the wind that blows one way to[-day] may blow from the contrary point tomorrow [*torn off*] but where is all yr. boasted power of forgetting those you have liked? A sound brings those objects (I put them in the plural) back to yr. recollection & displays all the charms tht. had captivated you—and you fall in love anew, but not with them—with *that* sound—something like Vapid I think, & his Grandmother’s picture. Do you think you can manage both her & C[aroline]? Impossible. As a friend I say flirt as much as you please but do not get into a serious scrape before you are safe from the *present* one.

“As I was folding up this Letter, a servant arrived fm. town & brought me two Letters fm.



C[aroline]—if I know her, *vous n'en êtes pas quite*. Both the Letters are written the same day, one full of spirits, gaiete, Dinners Parties &c., &c., the other *false* written to deceive one, talking of her unhappiness & affecting to be perfectly quiet & resign'd. As this is not in her Nature, you will most likely know the contrary by this time, she is trying to act upon my feelings, & to make me tell her something about you. *This I shall not do*. She says you are 'angry, begs me to tell her why—entreats me to speak openly —& she will not betray me, perhaps I have shewn you her last Letter—if so she will forgive me—& so on.

“I am now inclined to think that if you could get her into a quiet state by any means, it would be the best chance. You might agree to see her quietly when she returns, provided she made none of the scenes she is so fond of; it might *possibly* go off in that way, but it never can while she is in this constant state of irritation, and whilst she thinks all about her wish to put an end to it. If she thought her friends cared less she would be more likely to take some other fancy—the result of all this seems to me that the best thing you can do is to marry, & that in fact you can get out of this scrape by no other means.”

One of these letters became the making of a quarrel. Lord Byron had written something important for Lady Melbourne's eye only, and Lady Caroline had seen it. Lady Melbourne said that Lady Caroline had tampered with her drawers. Lady Caroline said:

“I found on the floor of my room in London

a part of an open letter addressed to no one— & as I thought to me—I could not know it was to you. I left it exactly where I found it though I was spoken to of it in a way I did not like. I told it all of you, I care not who knows it—there was no crime in it.”

The incident is mysterious. Did Lady Melbourne wish her daughter-in-law to read the letter and take this means of ensuring that she did so ? Lord Byron seemed a little suspicious. When the incident happened Annabella had not refused him. But after Annabella’s refusal there is no evidence that Lady Melbourne ever pressed on the marriage until it was too irrevocably settled for her to do anything but help. Lady Caroline wrote to her mother-in-law on October 15, 1812 :

MY DEAREST LADY MELBOURNE,

Once more I assure you upon my honour, I never opened or intentionally read any letter of yours. I found a part of one on the floor—it was in a hand I used to receive to myself—I made no secret of it, I have committed no wrong. Hitherto *I* have behaved with perfect honour, deceived by every human being I never have returned in kind their ill-treatment—but as you say it is not for me to complain, & you shall none of you ever more tax me with too much openness. I have borne a great deal, & will bear no more—that which is not spoken is more to be dreaded than that which is seen. I shall write no more, only entreating you not to write unkindly to my Mother, who says, instead of delightful letters

from you, she receives at present nothing but a few short guarded lines — & why ? Upon my soul she is innocent, & ignorant of everything of this — she never names one I do not ever speak of & as to my having accused him I hope I did not. If I said he was unkind to me because I wished to behave well — I did him great wrong. I beg his, I beg your pardon. I scarcely know what I wrote. Do not tell him I said this. I conclude I have deserved the treatment I have met with, & I will bear it without complaint, but it was so unexpected & it is [*sic*] wounds me so deeply that you must not think I can write to you or any one again. Lady Melbourne I here do solemnly swear to you — by all that *you* may hold most sacred if it were not for my mother & the kindness I have received from you all, from this day forth you should never see me again. Oh that I had not been weak enough to return when Lord Byron brought me back, that I had never returned — but come it late, it will come at last — & such an exit I will make from this scene of Deceit & unkindness that it shall expiate even my atrocious conduct as you call [ ? it and ] the canting sorrow of which you accuse me. Lord Byron has *now* sealed my destruction, and it shall follow — mark these words — & when it comes remember it was not the mere impotence of frantic grief, but the secret firm resolution of a heart bitterly & deeply injured. I never more will write to you — & thanks for the letters I have received. I shall not reproach you for them — I deserve unkindness from you. I never have, I hope I never have, accused Lord Byron — he or you best know why he behaves ill to the Woman he so lately professed to love. He is changed perhaps, is

that a reason? No, we are not master of our affections; his love for another is no crime but I neither expected nor can bear insult, hatred, suspicion & contempt. I will not bear it; he may love who he pleases I shall never reproach him—but he should not treat me with cruelty & contempt.

Postmark: “Oc. 15—12.

C<sup>k</sup> on Suir” [Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary].

Lady Melbourne had warned Lord Byron that the only way to treat Lady Caroline was with firmness. Fate played into his hand. Lady Caroline in 1813 writes:

“I wrote to him & said: ‘Byron, when my letters tire or when you dislike writing, only tell truth—I can bear anything but suspense.’ Yet after far the kindest he ever wrote even more professing than the one I shewed you, one I could hardly like to shew, so full of such assurances—saying I must be his; he could not would not live much longer away—I say, after this letter, I never receivd a word. He was angry I know very well at one I wrote—a very improper one, no doubt, but I had heard such things, such double things of his saying & doing, that with my usual violence I wrote. About ten days after Mamma received a letter very gay & one or two little things about Cheltenham having cured him. I only had a cover inclosing John Green’s letter; after that 4 pages in praise of some other person & these words to me ‘correct yr. vanity which is ridiculous & proverbial, exert yr. Caprices on your new conquests & leave me in peace, yrs. Byron.’ I never

shall forget what pain I felt. Off was despatched an express —‘only for God sake, Byron, explain yourself. What have I done—if you are tired of me say so, but do not, do not treat me so.’

“The express brought me a letter I enclose, & it made me miserable. But I wrote no more, except the small note I inclos’d to you, & one other, but without one Idea, without one supposition about Lady Oxford. I wrote to her saying, ‘my Dearest Aspasia, only think Byron is angry with me! Will you write to him, will you tell him I have not done one thing to displease him, & that I am miserable—tell him I wrote him a cross letter I know. But I have a thousand times askd his pardon. He is tired of me, I see it by his letter. I will write no more—never teaze him—never intrude upon him, only do you obtain his forgiveness.’ I received no answer, & went to Dublin. There a letter came to me from Lady Oxford. As I thought it had her seal, I open’d it tho’ I knew it could not be an answer to mine as there had not been time. But it was a letter from him saying—‘Lady Caroline—our affections are not in our own power—mine are engaged. I love another—were I inclined to reproach you I might for 20 thousand things, but I will not. They really are not cause of my present conduct—my opinion of you is entirely alter’d, & if I had wanted anything to confirm me, your Levities your caprices & the mean subterfuges you have lately made use of while madly gay—of writing to me as if otherwise, would entirely have open’d my eyes. I am no longer yr. lover—I shall but never be less than your friend—it would be too dishonourable for me to name her to whom I am now entirely devoted & attached.’—& he put Lady Oxford’s



seal—one I had myself shewn him & laugh'd with him about, & he dated his letter Presteign. I have no complaints to make against him, or against her. Such are the facts, & now you shall hear what my wishes are—& if you think them unreasonable I will try & give them up. I did wish to see him because I think it would in every way be better—but I now feel this ought not to be, & my only desire is that you should engage him to write me a few lines just to recall those very harsh accusations—or, if he will believe these things against me, just to say he forgives me & we part in peace—because if I were to die I should be miserable at doing so without—*[MS. ends].*”

Later Lady Caroline did ask to see him once more, and Lady Melbourne advised that the interview should be in the presence of witnesses. The witness Lord Byron chose was Lady Oxford. Lady Melbourne reproached him for this, saying, “Why, if a third person was necessary, did you not ask me? I would have left the room if she was calm.”

The final rupture came on July 6, 1813, at a party at Lady Heathcote's <sup>1</sup> house, where all the beauty of London Society was assembled, the younger women, in their short-waisted gowns with tight skirts, their high nodding plumes in the fashion of the Empire, the older women, like Lady Melbourne, with the sweeping robes of their younger days. She was then 61. Though her

<sup>1</sup> Wife of Admiral Sir John Heathcote.

beauty was less brilliant and her presence more imposing, she was still a magnificent figure in any assembly, and her dress and charm of manner were as full of care and art as ever. The men in their high neckcloths and knee-breeches moved about among the women. Whitbread might have been seen in one corner with Lord Grey, Sheridan rather drunk rolling about in another corner. The new Member for Camelford (Henry Brougham), who had been elected in 1810, an unknown young lawyer who so far had not opened his mouth in the House of Commons, stood alone surveying the crowd with a rather fierce and malignant eye. The candles in the candelabra gave a soft light—and who that has not seen it can know how soft and beautiful women look under candlelight?

Suddenly the crowd broke, and there passed with Lady Oxford on his arm a figure, so sinister in its beauty, so paralysing and fascinating in look, that Moore says Lady Rosebery, wife of the 4th Lord Rosebery, to whom Lord Byron had once spoken in a doorway, “was terrified to meet him, for her heart beat so violently she could not answer him.”<sup>1</sup> In the shifting crowd he came face to face with a flitting airy figure, very fair of face, but with haggard dark eyes, worn with weeping. Their eyes met—no shadow even of recognition came into his, and he passed on to the supper room with Lady Oxford, who uttered an affected laugh.

<sup>1</sup> *Moore's Diary*, chap. iii, p. 247.

It was too much. Lady Caroline completely lost her self-control ; shriek after shriek alarmed the guests, and there followed the scene which is depicted in a letter from the Duchess of Beaufort to Lady Holland :

*To Lady Holland from the Duchess of Beaufort*<sup>1</sup>

*Wednesday, July 8th, 1813.*

I am perfectly horror struck, my dear Lady Holland, at the account I have received from town, of the scene at Ly. Heathcote's. To a degree I hope & think the particulars sent me may be & are exaggerated, but I have been told that poor Ly. C[aroline] L[amb] not only wounded herself in several places, but at last was carried out by several people actually in a straight waistcoat. For her individually I should feel the greatest compassion, but when I think of what poor Lady Bessborough's feelings must be I really cannot express my strong comiseration at what her sufferings must be. I daresay Beau[fort] will write a line himself but *if* he does not, you know his good heart sufficiently to judge how much he must suffer on poor Lady B[essborough's] account. Pray let me hear from you. These tales of horror strike me I assure you with aggravated terror in the country where only imperfect reports reach one, & nothing occurs to drive away the impression that such dreadful details must make on one's mind. In the world you have such a succession of occurrences that one event drives out another—but in the quiet of St. Leonard's the recollection

<sup>1</sup> Daughter of the 1st Marquess of Stafford, married Lord Worcester, afterwards 5th Duke of Beaufort.

of this poor ly. Caroline & her afflicted friends will continue to haunt me night & day. You will I am sure write & give us every detail.

Later came an even more distressing account from Lady Melbourne :

*To Lord Byron from Lady Melbourne*

7th July 1813.

DR. LD. B.

She is what she calls calm this morn., & I was in hopes I might have read some parts of yr. Letter to her—& in that intention told her I had heard & that you wish'd to know how she was, but I soon found, that the less I sd. the better. I ask'd her if she had any message to send ; she sd. tell him I have been ill, that I am now calm, but not very well but don't tell him what pass'd the other night. I then sd.—probably you have told him yr. own story, have you written ? After an awkward attempt at equivocation, she confess'd she had, but denied your having sent an answer. However this I don't believe, as I do not see how you could avoid answering her. She then sd. she should not abuse you ; she should keep her thoughts to herself—& to the World she should praise yr. behaviour—& upon my just hinting that she had sd. shameful things the other night & that I was glad she had made this determination she went into a rage, saying tht. she would expose you & clear herself & so on. She is now like a Barrel of Gunpowder & takes fire with the most trifling spark. She has been in a dreadfull [*sic*]  
—I was interrupted & obliged to put my paper into my

drawer, & now I cannot for my life recollect what I was going to say—oh now I have it!—I was stating tht. she had been in a dreadful bad humour this last week. With her, when the fermentation begins there is no stopping it till it bursts forth, she must have gone to Ly. H[eathcote's] determined to pique you by her waltzing & when she found that fail'd, in her passion she wish'd to expose you, not feeling how much worse it was for herself. Now she seems ashamed—for the first time I ever saw the least mark of that feeling. It might have been kept secret but for Ly. O[xford] & Ly. H[eathcote]—the first from folly—the other from being entirely ignorant how to be good natur'd & from a wish to display her fine feelings. That is the reason why all these Women abuse you—how I hate that affectation of sentiment! I knew they would talk & thought if it reach'd you it must make you uncomfortable & therefore desired Ly. O. to say to you there had been a scene—but tht. she was calm'd & I would write to you next morn'g. At present I am trying to get her out of Town & hope I shall succeed. I was able to send for Fre[deric]k whom I knew could hold her & I could not by myself & indeed I must do Ly. B[essborough] the *justice* to say that her representation of her violence in these paroxysms was not at all exaggerated. I could not have believed it possible for any one to carry absurdity to such a pitch. I call it so, for I am convinced she knows perfectly what she is about all the time, but she has no idea of controuling her fury. She broke a glass & scratched herself, as you call it, with the broken pieces. Ly. O. & Ly. H. screamed instead of taking it from her, & I had



just left off holding her for 2 minutes—she had a pair of scissors in her hand when I went up, with which she was wounding herself but not deeply. Pray if you answer her letters do not let her find out I have written you word of all this. I shall perhaps meet you somewhere but if I do not, you shall hear how we go on. I can not describe how fatigued I was yesterday.

I must finish

Yrs. ever

E. M.

So far as can be known by these letters Lady Caroline corresponded no more with Lord Byron, though Lady Melbourne continued writing to him. There is no record of how William Lamb took this last terrible sign of his wife's madness. Lady Melbourne felt that anything would be better than a separation between Caroline and William. She knew the faults of William's nature and dreaded his leaving her roof, which he might do were his wife no longer there.

In the midst of all these domestic troubles Lady Melbourne seems to have had little time for influencing the larger issues of life. No letters of hers tell of what was happening in the world and how the country was at that moment passing through the throes of misgovernment. William was no longer in Parliament. His spirit seemed broken by his wife's vagaries.

Lord Wellesley and Lord Moira were each in turn asked to form a government. In the end

Lord Liverpool was sent for by the Prince. He accepted the offer, and Creevy tells us that at a meeting at his house on June 9 he declared to the Government Members that "the intention of the Government is not to oppose the Catholic question as a Government measure, but to let everyone do as he pleases."<sup>1</sup>

The elections in 1812 produced a triumphant Tory majority. Lord Castlereagh had succeeded Lord Wellesley at the Foreign Office. His foreign policy was effective and the Peninsular campaign was going well. The old Whigs did not care to press hostilities when the Government was so successful, and became but a weak opposition. Henry Brougham, who had been Member for Camelford, belonged to the new "Radical Party," which sat on the same side of the House as the Whigs. He saw that the position between the Prince Regent and his wife the Princess of Wales was a weapon to his hand with which to attack the Government.

The unfortunate position of the Princess excited much compassion, and the middle classes especially sympathized with her. The Regent had as early as 1806 appointed a commission to inquire into his wife's conduct, and when the old King died would not allow her daughter to see her more than once a fortnight. When the Princess remonstrated he paid no attention, and she published the letter in the *Morning Chronicle*.

<sup>1</sup> Creevy *Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 158.

The Prince's retort was to appoint another commission to inquire into her behaviour, and Lady Melbourne wrote to Lord Byron, with whom she still corresponded—

“Have you read the *Times* of today? There is an account of Lord Moira having examined two people which will not redound to his honour or to that of his employer. The remarks before the depositions are very good. I am told, but not from good authority, that they are written by Mr. Whitbread.<sup>1</sup> I hear it is the fashion amongst Ladies to burn their newspapers—that the servants may not read such improprieties. They had better burn them without reading when they are first brought—that would really be acting with propriety.

“As you sd. I *must* get well, I have been out this morn. which I was told would do me good, & I have thoughts of going to Ly. Holland's this Evng. You see this is doing the best I can in obedience to yr. orders, but if I catch cold in so doing & be lay'd up in a Fever I shall say *you* made me do this—it is all *yr.* fault—this is Yr. Lordps method of reasoning.”

Annabella, whose father and mother had taken a house in Portland Place, had been, in spite of her first decision, thinking a great deal of Lord Byron. She wrote to Lady Melbourne on July 18, as she was leaving London :

“I am sorry to find that a report very disadvantageous to Lord Byron is in circulation, and

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Whitbread, Member for Tavistock.

as I cannot believe it I wish it may be contradicted. It is said, and in a circle where it is likely to have credit, that he has behaved very unhandsomely to the young man who purchased Newstead—that the latter from the imprudent eagerness of youth bid much more for the property than it was worth and that, though almost ruined by the contract, Lord B. cruelly takes advantage of the Law to make him adhere to unfair terms. I should be very ungenerous if I did not put the most candid construction on all Lord Byron's actions and if I did not wish that others should do the same. As I shall not have an opportunity of seeing him again I should be glad if you would tell him that however long his absence may be, I shall always have pleasure in hearing that he is happy, and if my esteem can afford him any satisfaction, he may rely on my not adopting the opinions of those who wrong him. Of the propriety of this communication you will judge, but I feel certain that it would not be misunderstood, and unless he is more changeable than I imagine, he may be gratified by my friendly dispositions, particularly at a moment when he experiences such painful injustice."

She also wrote directly she arrived in the country :

"Since I left London I have not heard anything of your proceedings, except such reports concerning Lady Caroline as I cannot credit. I am anxious to know if she has kept her good resolutions, or rather her good promises, for she has hitherto seemed incapable of forming a *serious*

resolution. However I hope the *temptation* is far away. When we were in Yorkshire we heard of George at Mr. Taylor's and we had the felicity of seeing one of his companions, Mr. Strickland, who certainly ought to be the hero of 'Patience & Perseverance.' But if I do not *capitulate at once*, I do not think I shall be gained by *such means*."

In October she wrote to say that she was reading the "Giaour":

*To Lady Melbourne from Miss Milbanke*

1813.

I have just been reading the *enlarged* Edition of *Giaour*, and think the additions very beautiful. The description of Love almost makes *me* in love. Certainly he excels in the language of Passion, whilst the power of delineating inanimate nature appears more copiously bestowed on other poets. Perhaps he has not displayed his excellence in that line only because it has not so much occupied his attention. In the *intellectual* he is truly sublime, yet I cannot believe that his Genius has yet attained its maturity. There is a progressive improvement in his writings. I shall be glad of his stay in England as I may hope to have some share of his agreeable society next year in London. After the lapse of nearly two years since the declaration of his wishes, it is not probable that they should continue in a sufficient degree to occasion mutual embarrassment. I consider his acquaintance as so desirable that I would incur the risk of being called a Flirt for the sake of enjoying it, provided I may do so without detri-



ment to himself—for you know that his welfare has been as much the object of my consideration as if it were connected with my own. To shew you that Invention does not languish in this country I was told a few days since that Lord Byron had gone to establish himself in some remote island with a younger daughter of Lady Oxford's, whom he was to educate & ultimately to marry.

The Novel which you recommend will be a welcome interruption to my present studies, which I should suppose were suited to your taste—metaphysical reasoning, Locke, Dugald Stuart, &c. My early study of Mathematics has contributed to lead me to these pursuits, since they are in fact the Demonstrat[ions] of Moral Philosophy. I differ from many in considering such books of great *practical* utility—even in the commonest circumstances of life. You will laugh, & think I mean to eat my dinner metaphysically. Perhaps I might be allowed to *waltz metaphysically* without incurring even Lord B.'s censure.

On February 12, 1814, we read that she had finished the “Corsair”:

“I have just finished the Corsair—am in the greatest admiration. In knowledge of the human heart & its most secret workings surely he may without exaggeration be compared to Shakespeare. He gives such wonderful life & individuality to character that from *that* cause, as well as from unjust prepossessions as to his *own* disposition, the idea that he represents himself in his heroes may be partly accounted for. It is difficult to

believe that he could have known these beings so thoroughly but from *introspection*.

Who hath seen  
Man as himself—the secret spirit face ?

I am afraid the compliment to his poetry will not repay him for the injury to his character."

And on April 29 she wrote :

MY DEAR AUNT,

After this reform in my Constitution you will be happy to hear of a reform in my Character, which is that I am become a great Politician, and there was a bonfire last night on the village green which I admired with a proper degree of patriotism. Have you not been astonished at the fate of Bonaparte ? Lord Byron's Ode to him is, I think, admirable—yet perhaps rather too philosophical for the character of an Ode. I have to inform you that my father & mother, hearing that he was likely to renew his Northern tour, have thought it advisable to invite him here, and, deserving as you think him and as he has proved himself, of the fullest confidence, I trust you will not think it an objectionable measure. I shall be very glad if he should avail himself of the invitation, which my father sends by this post, as it will be one of the best compensations for what I lose in Society this year. I am very indifferent about reports, and I know you think it the wisest plan to be so.

The foundations of the engagement were probably laid during this visit. After it was settled Lady Melbourne wrote to Lord Byron suggesting

that now the marriage had been arranged the sooner it took place the better :

“So at last yr. Agent condescends to fix some time when he will meet my Brs. people. I know tht. all those sort of personages who have had the *Management* of an Estate, & of course of the owner of it, are displeased, when they think it likely they may lose a portion of their power, by its being transferr’d to a Wife—I mean power over their employer, & mostly dupe. They are enemies to matrimony, as much as you see I am to them ; in truth I never knew a Man who had not the *cleverest* & *honestest* agent in the World & if ever I have become acquainted with them or their actions, I have seldom found them honest, sometimes sinning from stupidity, but invariably turning everything to their own advantage & selfish to the highest degree, and always enriching themselves. Mr. Hansom may be an exception to this rule—I certainly have no acquaintance with him, & never heard his Name but from you—so I do not say this from any knowledge I have either of him or his character but were I to judge from appearances I should say he has been unpardonably dilatory in this business from the beginning & were I Annabella I should *never forget* him. And indeed it may be well for yr. Lordship that I am not for you would come in for your share of blame too—but we’ll say no more about it. On this occasion I should wish the whole to be concluded speedily, & as I am well acquainted with the dilatoriness, puzzle-headedness &c., &c., of my Brother’s Agents if I were you I would try & be married upon Articles. If you laugh at this at least acknow-

ledge tht. I am eager to sign myself yr. affte. Aunt. I have entered on this dry subject in a Letter knowing tht. I never should have got you to listen even to twenty words of it in a conversation."

Annabella wrote from home saying the marriage would take place about the end of December, but the actual date was January 2, 1815, in the Chapel at Seaham. Whether Lady Melbourne had worked to bring about this result is uncertain, and in the many letters she wrote to Lord Byron after Annabella's refusal there are nothing but warnings. In one of her replies to him on August 23, 1813, from Cheltenham, where she had gone to take the waters, she says :

" You can not expect me, with my head full of these Waters, (which make even Nugent's twirl about, strong as it appears)—to understand & unravel the confusion tht. exists amongst all the different Ladies you allude to. You are accus-tom'd to it; therefore to you I have no doubt it is clear. My Magical influence!—you make me Laugh. I won't say, as the Mareshalle d'Ancre (I think it was) when she was going to be executed for witchcraft & was ask'd by what means she obtain'd her power over some persons I have forgot—" *par le pouvoir qu'ont les esprits forts sur les ames faibles* "—for I have no pretensions to strength of mind, & I always think that when people talk of my power they are laughing at me and you more than anyone I have ever met with. And I have no objection to it, for I like a joke even when against myself & it always

appears to me that when you are describing my influence over you, you mean yours over me."

The result of the marriage is well known. Ada Byron was born on December 10, 1815, and on January 15, 1816, Lady Byron, taking her child with her, left her husband's home for ever.

That Lady Melbourne, who always knew everything, was a little anxious is proved by the letter she wrote Lord Byron in 1815, saying: "I hope you'll come very soon do you hear? or rather do you heed?"

From Kirkby, which Lady Byron's mother had just inherited from her uncle Lord Wentworth, Lady Melbourne received a letter probably from her brother Sir Ralph, telling her of the proposed separation. She answered:

"I am miserable to think what A. must have suffered before she would have resolved to bring such an appeal before the World. As you say justly you have every consolation from her known Character, as it is not possible that anyone can stand higher in publick opinion than she does, or be more beloved by her private friends—& I must add that Ld. Byron appeared to me to appreciate her value most justly for he came to me the day before this report had made its way into the world & for an hour talk'd only of her many amiable qualities & how much he lov'd her. This you may believe rendered me perfectly incredulous at first, & made it difficult if not impossible for me to believe anything I heard



—till I enquired from you—& from whatever cause these unhappy differences may have arisen I must feel extremely sorry for both at the same time that I respect your motives for concealment . . . you speak of the necessity of the measures you have taken, & I have a full reliance upon your judgment—but knowing as little as I do I confess I wish it could have been settled amicably—& not brought before a tribunal like the World where everything of the sort is discussed & represented with levity indifference & derision & without regard to the pain it may give. Everything that passes between Husband & Wife ought to be sacred—the strongest reasons can hardly justify a departure from this rule—that you have them [*sic*] the relative situation of Husband & Wife is so delicate, so united & blended together, that both must be affected in some degree by publicity.”

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CLOSING DAYS OF LADY MELBOURNE'S LIFE

IN 1814 Peace was proclaimed, but it was as the prophet said "a peace where there was no peace." The British Army had been established on the French side of the Pyrenees the winter before the Russian, Prussian and Austrian Armies entered Paris. Shortly after Napoleon abdicated and was allowed to retire to Elba. Louis XVIII was restored to the throne of France, and in May visited London. The Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia followed, and England gave herself up to rejoicing. Among others less celebrated who came to London was Madame de Stael, and neither Lady Melbourne nor Lady Cowper liked her. Drawing-rooms were held at which the Prince Regent refused to allow his wife to be present. Lady Melbourne was now 62, and probably did not take much part in the receptions and balls, but Lady Cowper went everywhere, and told her mother in her daily visits what had interested her.

Lady Bessborough was travelling abroad, and during the early days of January 1815 Lady Melbourne received from her an account of a

visit paid to Bonaparte at Elba by Mr. Douglas, son of Lord Glenbervie—which gave little sign of the blow which was coming :

“ I have a Letter today from Ly. Bessborough—they are at Marseilles & living with Massena—who when he saw the D. of Wellin<sup>a</sup> at Paris sd. to him, vous m’avez tant fait jeuner milord, que vous voudrez bien, j’en suis sur me donner un bon diner—D. Wellington answered—si je vous ai fait jeuner vous me l’avez bien rendu, en m’empechant de dormir—et je crois que pour avoir le droit de nous dire ces bons Mots nous nous sommes assez tourmentés. Massena expresses great admiration of him & when he is mentioned always says—c’est un grand capitaine—Ly. B[essborough] says if it were possible to forgive his rapacity he might be thought very agreeable. Your Friend & Ly. B.’s friend Mr. Douglas has been to visit Buonaparte at Elba—who told him he was afraid he had not had Wine enough at Paris—but he would find plenty at Elba. It is supposed he judged from the appearance of his Face. Mr. Vernon has also been to see him, & was much question’d by him about English Politicks, & on finding tht. he belonged to the Oppo[sitio]n he said that is a party that is now very low. Yes, sd. Mr. Vernon, & that is because we maintained tht. you would conquer Spain; & you were right, he answered, for I ought to have done so, & it is the fault of my Generals that I did not. . . . The P[rince]ss of Wales is playing all sorts of tricks all over Italy—they say of her Mon dieu est-ce là la vertu opprimée dont nous avons tant entendu parler.”

Frederick Lamb, who was now about 33,

had been called from the two Sicilies in 1815 to accompany Lord Castlereagh to the Congress of Vienna, which sat after Napoleon's abdication to restore the balance of power in Egypt and to divide the spoil. The Congress was showing signs of violent disagreement, when to the horror and amazement of Europe, Napoleon escaped from Elba, landed at Cannes, the French Army rallying to him regiment by regiment as he marched through France on Paris. He entered Paris on March 20, while the King and his family fled. Those who had gone to Brussels to economize after the war knew that they were in a terrible position when Napoleon, who by then commanded an army of 535,000 men, marched to join it on the Belgian frontier on June 12.

That summer, Lord and Lady Bessborough were coming slowly home when the news reached them on July 8 that Frederick Ponsonby, their son and Lady Caroline's brother, had been desperately wounded at the Battle of Waterloo. Lady Bessborough made a forced journey to Brussels to nurse him, and Lady Caroline Lamb must have joined her there, for she wrote to Lady Melbourne an account of their stay in Brussels. The letter is quieter and more consecutive than any of her previous correspondence, and she could even laugh at herself when she spoke of Lady Frances Webster, who had been Lady Frances Annesley, daughter of the 1st Earl of Mountmorres, and who

had married James Wedderburn Webster, a friend of Lord Byron. The latter had paid her marked attentions about the time of his rupture with Lady Caroline. In 1815 she was, as we see, the object of the Duke of Wellington's admiration. Perhaps the horrible suffering which Lady Caroline saw around her sobered her, and for a brief space awoke her to the realities of life, even though the change did not last long.

*To the Viscountess Melbourne (from Lady Caroline Lamb)*

BRUSSELS, 1815.

DEAREST LADY MELBOURNE,

Your letter is the only one of any sort we have receivd. & very acceptable it was—I cannot describe to you how totally cut off from news of every sort. It is said that Buonaparte & his Brothers having delivered themselves up to the protection of England are gone there & Madame de la Ruilliere (?) to our great regret & *hers* set out this morning with the Prince de Condé for Cambery by Louis orders. The English name stands so high from Ostend here that it makes one feel proud. The moment they see you every one pulls off their hats & caps,—& if they ask yr. Country & you say “English” they answer “that is passport enough.” . . .

The great amusement at Bruxelles, indeed the only one except visiting the sick, is to make large parties & go to the field of Battle—& pick up a skull or a grape shot or an old shoe or a letter, & bring it home. W[illia]m has been, I shall not go—unless when Fred [Ponsonby] gets better, &



goes with me. There is a great affectation here of making lint & bandages—but where is there not some? & at least it is an innocent amusement. It is rather a love making moment, the half wounded Officers reclining with pretty ladies visiting them—is dangerous. I also observe a great coxcombality in the dress of the sick—which prognosticates a speedy recovery. It is rather heart-breaking to be here, however, & one goes blubbering about—seeing such fine people without their legs & arms, some in agony, & some getting better. The Prince of Orange enquired much after all his acquaintance; he suffers a great deal, but bears it well. The next door to us has a Col<sup>l</sup> Millar, very patient, but dreadfully wounded. Lady Conyngham is here—Lady C. Greville—Lady D. Hamilton, Mrs. A. B. c. d. Smith, Lady F. Somerset, Lady F. Webster most affected—& Lady Mountmorress<sup>1</sup> who stuck her parasol yesterday into a skull at Waterloo. Perhaps a certain rivalry makes me see her less favourably, but indeed Lady F. Webster is too ridiculous. Mr. Bradshaw, an amiable Dandy close by me, says it makes him ill for 2 hours after he has seen her. I conclude that you have heard that the D[uke] of Wellington fell desperately in love with her & 2 others, which was the cause of his not being at the Battle in time. The D[uche]ss of Richmond's fatal Ball has been much censured; there never was such a Ball—so fine & so sad—all the young men who appeared there shot dead a few hours after.

After a great war, when the energies of mankind

<sup>1</sup> Lady Mountmorres, mother of Lady Frances.

have been set on destruction and not on construction, it is obvious that the condition of all the countries concerned must be in a very bad state.

After the long years of war with Napoleon England was no exception to this rule. The reduction of the Army after the Battle of Waterloo had made matters worse by throwing a vast number of men out of work, and even before Napoleon's escape the Government had begun to try and help the misery of the poor by bringing in a Corn Bill.

Frederick Lamb was now on his way back from Vienna to Paris, and his mother wrote to him a masterly résumé of the probable results of this Bill.

*From Lady Melbourne to the Hon. Frederick  
Lamb*

27th Feby. 1815.

DEAREST FREDERICK,

I received yr. Letter fm. Vienna of the 12th, & according to my calculation you will probably be at Paris about the time this Letter reaches it,—I read with pleasure your favorable prognostics respecting finance, & I am sure if my easy sailing could accomplish it, there would be no fear but where all the Crew are not agreed & counteract one another, the sails are often tightened even to breaking but we will talk over these matters & it is a great comfort to have any one to whom one can talk to without reserve—for tho' you are interested in the subject—you

are not slight & that makes the great difference—but I won't bore about it now.

We are in the midst of violence & dissensions respecting this Corn Bill which to me, from the first, has appeared the simplest question that could be agitated—& all their reasons & calculations on both sides seem to puzzle the question. I look upon experience as the surest guide on all such questions, where at the first setting out much must depend on Theory. Now for a number of the most flourishing yrs. we lived under the operation of a Corn Bill & everything respecting importation & exportation went on to the advantage of both growers & consumers—two successive yrs. of bad Harvests all over Europe raised the price to such a sum, tht. the Corn Bill remain'd on the shelf, & could not be brought into action. The War & depreciation of the currency kept up the prices—when the first ceased, & there was also a large produce the prices fell. Does it not seem wise whilst the depreciation of the currency continues to raise the price at which Corn may be imported—so as to bring that trade again under the action of that same Corn Bill, which had succeeded so well—by raising the price according to the circumstances of the times. I have gone more at length into this than I had any idea of doing & it may perhaps bore you but I must mention one circumstance more. The ports are now shut from the average of the Corn having sunk below this original Corn Bill I mention—which some of our great Political Economists asserted could never happen, but then this is only for those [*or three*] mths.—& a very small rise, will, at the expiration of that time, open them again. The cry raised agst. high rents has very

little to do with it, so you need not think that I am influenced.

The fresh fighting which ended in the Battle of Waterloo had forced the Government to an even higher taxation, which pressed most heavily on the landed proprietors, and on February 17 a Member of Parliament wrote to Mr. Creevy<sup>1</sup> that

“in regard to our internal—AGRICULTURE, &c., is getting into a state of DESPAIR absolutely and distraction. . . . I assure you the landed people are getting desperate; the universality of ruin among them, or distress bordering on it, is absolutely unparallel'd, and at such a moment the sinking fund is not to be TOUCHED for the world, says HORNER<sup>2</sup>—no not a shilling of it: and yet—taxes to be taken off, rents to come down, cheap corn, cheap labour—how can a man talk of such IMPOSSIBILITIES? Cut the Establishment ever so low, we shall have four times as much to raise as before the war. It is not to be done out of the same rents, &c., &c. It is absolute madness to talk of it. . . . By the bye—there was a moment for the exertion of yr. talents in the job-oversetting way, and fighting every shilling of expenditure. This is the time, never before equalled. They cannot resist on these points, and the carrying them is valuable beyond measure, prospectively as well as immediately. Whenever you blow one jobb fairly out of the water,

<sup>1</sup> *Creevy Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Horner, M.P., economist, born 1778, died 1817.



it presents a hundred others, and this is the moment ! ”

Frederick had developed into a very remarkable man. He was exceedingly good-looking, and with the charm of his mother and her cool, clear judgment he combined an upright character, hating deception and intrigue. Diplomacy and the Navy alike entail the certainty of long separation from home and a lifetime spent abroad. In a letter he wrote to his sister Emily, about a year before Napoleon's abdication, he writes :

*Hon. Frederick Lamb to Lady Cowper*

*Jan. 6, 1814.*

My dearest Emily it is a great deal too true that for many years I have lived a great deal too little with you, and I know very well that I shall finish by knowing none of you. I do not think of this without regret, nor sometimes I am sorry to say without a little bitterness, when I think for what very small objects these sacrifices have been made, and how very many more remain before any good can result from them. My old amusement and yr. present one of castle building has completely deserted me, but if fate shld. ever bring you on to the Continent while I am here, and unable to come to you, I shall not easily forgive it if don't succeed in prevailing on you to come to me. I don't myself think peace so very near but yet not very far off. What will become of me I am just now very uncertain, but in my present situation I shall certainly not stay beyond the middle of March—perhaps I may return to



England for a short time, which in my own opinion is the best thing that is likely to happen to me. You can't write about any thing that does not interest me, and there is a tone of happiness and content in yr. letter which is very delightful to me.

Frederick kept up a constant correspondence with his mother and, after her death, he continued to write regularly to his sister Emily. He seems, though always at a distance, to have exercised a great influence over his brothers and his sister, and he was evidently devoted to his mother, in whom he placed complete confidence. In 1815 he was sent from Munich to Frankfort to settle some diplomatic business, and from there he wrote to his mother, sympathizing with her in the trials of such daughters-in-law as Lady Caroline the wife of William, whom he calls "the little beast," and Caroline St. Jules the wife of George, "the other lady," or "the quiet lady" as she is called later on.

*To the Viscountess Melbourne from Hon. F.  
Lamb*

FRANKFURT, 1815.

MY DRST. MOTHER,

Yr. long letter gave me great pleasure and I thank you very much for it, but it had quite a different effect from what you intended for it shewed me how extremely and continually you are plagued by the little beast and with how

much reason. I am sure it wears you, and it can not do otherwise. The other Lady I think less about because she is out of the house and you do not see her so continually, but two such curses were never inflicted upon a family which was so perfectly happy and united before they came into it. I have not business enough here to occupy me at all, and not the least particle of amusement, as there is neither public theatre nor private house to go to of an evening, and the cry for economy reaches me and straightens me too much for me to be able to have any body to my house. I have made a representation upon the subject, which will not be attended to, but which will be a good ground for resigning the mission as soon as the only important part of it is finished, but I wish this to remain a most profound secret between you and me; it's getting wind in the least would totally derange my plan. God bless you my Dearest Mother, I wish I had a receipt to give you against the torment of the little beast, but I know of none, even my patience wld. be of no avail there, for she makes me furious. A settled firm resolution to have nothing to do with her, and not to care a sixpence what she does, is the best resource, and to recall this resolution and act upon it afresh every time that one feels oneself in danger of being made to break it by her. God bless you once more Dearest Mother, good night to you.

But in October he wrote a letter to his mother, so angry but so full of good sense, that she could not but agree with what he said. He may have felt that Lady Melbourne was trying to pull strings,

an accomplishment in which he knew she excelled, but which he detested for himself.

“The messenger goes only tonight, and as a proof of what I have said, this morning arrives a letter of Broughton of which I send you a cutting. You told me that he had told my father that my pay or rank would date from July last. He writes to me that my Father had told him that such was the case. He has probably lied, to one or other of us, but the system of talking to him upon any such subjects is really a very bad one—the less that pitiful fellow is named in my concerns the better. Any thing he may promise to my Father will never be useful as it never has been—the thing will be done according to the regular rules of the office, and I don’t wish it to be done otherwise. It will be done in the kindest manner by Castlereagh who has the undivided merit and should have the whole thanks, but that it shd. go round to him through Hamilton that an Underling like Broughton had been told that such and such were the Regent’s intentions is unpleasant and beneath our situation. It is nothing to the purpose whether this was really said to him or no, since something was said which gave him the power of fancying or imagining it. He is only an agent about money, and should never be thought of as anything else. I send this privately to you that you may quietly stop it, for I would rather it shld. happen ten times over than have the appearance of having an unkind feeling about it. What I want of you is to burn this letter, and instead of montéing people’s têtes about what I am doing and getting and where I am going—to preach perfect indifference and non-interference

if possible even to forgetfulness. I think you will see the reason and wisdom of this, and if you don't—take my word for it. I have been right throughout, I was right in coming to Vienna, I was right in not going to Chatillon, and about both these things you wrote me a sort of half cutting letters which I had temper enough never to take the least notice of. The event has proved that I was perfectly right—and what I want of you is for the future not to suppose that you at 2,000 miles off know better than me upon the spot, nor to believe every half-witted, short-sighted ass who may go home and give you the motives which actuate me when in fact he sees no further into me than the outside of my coat. There, now God bless you—I have business, and with my best love to my Father

“am most affectly.

F. L.”

From Munich he wrote to his mother to say :

“ With this you will receive a parcel of sable fur which I ordered from Russia in the extreme cold of winter, and which has just arrived. It is too fine for me & I think it may save you many colds for many winters coming out of the opera house, if you do but think it pretty enough to wear. Only don't be stingy of it but have a good pelisse lined with it as they do here.”

An interesting trait in Frederick's letters was that he generally recapitulated in them part of the contents of his mother's letter, and his remarks on one she wrote early in June soon after Bona-



parte's escape show what the state of England was just before Waterloo :

“ A thousand thanks for yr. accounts of the state of the country, which always interest me exceedingly. The interest of the national debt is yr. great evil—the high rate of pay to the Army, when all other wages are falling is another—and these 2 can not be got rid of. The others will cure themselves, but when all prices have come to a low level, I fear there will be much difficulty to the taxpayers, or Payers of taxes, to continue to provide for the interest of the debt. As to the distress among the people, it is nothing, it is not to be spoken or thought of in comparison to what exists over all the rest of Europe. You may judge of this if you read the account of the emigrations down the Rhine &c. and reflect what misery must have existed in the countries these poor wretches have quitted, in order to drive them from thence. Do you wish to know the impression England produces upon a Foreigner ? —Take the acc[oun]t of Mon. Berstett, whom I did not introduce to you as you rightly judged because I didn't wish to bore you—but who is a sensible impartial man, qui a beaucoup vu, but who never saw England before. He says that he never witnessed before such a state of incredible prosperity and activity, that Paris through which he returned, appears perfectly dead in comparison to London, that the alarm of popular commotion is perfectly contemptible, but that liberty is carried to the greatest possible perfection, and that it would be impossible not to adore a country where every man is filled with the confidence and security of possessing it. As to



the prices he says they are much lower than here, and instances that the sack of potatoes which costs 6 shillings in England, costs 9 florins, or eighteen shillings here. I think he must have made some mistake in the measures—but its certain that prices here are enormous, their fall in England is I conceive a source of great hardship to all who live by the rent of land, and who pay taxes—but it comes even to the poor after the first difficulty of the change is got over.”

His love for his mother showed through every line of his letters. When his sister Emily took a journey abroad with her husband in 1816, he believed that from the route they took they would find it impossible to visit him. His heart ached for a sight of his sister’s face, and he wrote angrily to his mother, who scolded him. He replied with tender words :

“ I know I was cross at missing that little devil Emily and you do very well to scold me, but still she is a rattle-pate and perhaps I shldn’t. love her so much if she was not so. And now for you Drst. Mother who formalize yrself. because I thank you for doing things for me, but the truth is that I think I take it a great deal too much for granted that all my business be what it may is to be put upon yr. shoulders and am sensible myself that *en pareil cas* I might feel as kindly but shld. not be half as constantly attentive and active, and though I will thank you no more as you don’t like it, yet I never have thanked you half enough for it. It’s laughable—if I hadn’t corrected myself I was just going to thank you for something else.”

He hoped to return to England for a short time and wrote her, though she was 63:

"Beg my father if he has two or three tolerable hacks to have them in condition about November, and be yourself in riding order that we may have three or four very long conversations."

When the Princess of Wales paid a visit to Munich in 1815 he wrote:

"Think of my luck. The princess of Wales has fallen like an Avalanche upon Munich—followed by a group of Turks and Italians habited like Crusaders. The Picqueur is her 1r [premier] Chevalier d'honneur—her Dame d'honneur is his Wife, judge of the rest of her Court. She herself in a Gown without a fold in it sitting close to the shape, with her petticoats above the calf of her legs, is the gaze of the whole town—all doors, all windows are crowded to see her and her motley troop. She has been at a ball and rolled a walse with Beauharnois—if she approaches Francfort I shall evacuate the town, and leave the care of her reception to the Ex-King of Sweden—with whom I am *en rapport* already."

The year 1816 was one of trial to Lady Melbourne. Lady Caroline had continued her eccentricities to a pitch which nearly drove her mother-in-law mad. Smarting at Lord Byron's neglect, she wrote and published in May a novel called *Glenarvon*, in which she was the heroine called Calanthe. She admits that when the book came out, even her husband, who had stood her friend

till now, solemnly told her that if she really had published this book he would never see her again.

Creedy gives us an account of the book in his *Memoirs*. Lady Mandeville was Lady Oxford, and Lady Augusta a combination of Lady Jersey and Lady Collier, Buchanan was Sir Godfrey Webster, and Glenarvon and Vivian both represented Lord Byron. Sophia was Lady Granville, and there is a slight sketch of Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster. Lady Melbourne is also made to appear in the book and depicted as bigoted and vulgar: she is probably represented under the name of Mrs. Seymour. Creedy says, "I am sorry to see the Melbourne family so miserable about it. Lady Cowper is really frightened and depressed, far beyond what is necessary."

The book itself is a strange medley—a true product of the disordered mind which penned it. The frivolous and worldly women whom the authoress satirizes are placed against a background of wild romance, and among scenery as grim and dreadful as that of the *Bride of Lammermoor*. The whole is painted with a dark and heavy brush, giving a sinister atmosphere. The hero, the heroine and other characters are generally to be found either perched alone on a lofty crag overlooking a frightful precipice, or ascending, through stony paths and drenching rain, some rugged eminence, or they are driving furiously through the night. As day passes day

in this novel, crises succeed each other with fearful rapidity, and in that respect *Glenarvon* is a true picture of what Caroline made of life. The publication in the book of the actual letters, notably the one sealed by Lady Oxford, and the picture of the principal women of the day which it contains, constitute its chief interest, though it does contain some pretty writing and melodious songs. When Lord Byron was asked by Mme. de Stael what he thought of his portrait in the book, he answered, "Elle aurait été plus ressemblante si j'avais voulu donner plus de séances."

William determined to part with his wife. Whether his mother gave way or whether she withdrew her opposition because she knew it was of no use it is not possible to guess. She must have been terribly shocked by such a scandal, which gave to the world secrets which the authoress could only have known as a result of her intimacy with those by whom she had been surrounded since her youth.

The story is well known how, when the instruments of the separation had been brought to Lady Caroline for her signature, she was found seated on her husband's knee, feeding him with scraps of bread and butter. He may have relented—he may have felt that Caroline's complaint to her confidante, Lady Morgan, was just and that he had at first looked on her as a toy rather than a wife. The separation did not take place, but Lady Caroline was persuaded to retire to

Brocket, where, when she learned the remark that Byron had made on her book, she caused a bonfire to be lit which consumed every copy she had.

Her eccentricities grew rapidly. It appears from these letters that an attempt was made to prove her insane with the object of taking her child from her, but nothing came of this. She wrote another novel, *Ada Reis*, and some poetry, but gradually sank into ill health and suffering. On her deathbed she craved for her husband's presence, and could not die without seeing him. She said then, "The only noble fellow I ever met with is William Lamb. He is to me what Shore was to Jane Shore." He came over from Dublin, where he was Chief Secretary for Ireland, to see her, and her brother William Ponsonby, who had never left her, said, "Lamb acted as I always knew he would do."

To add to the family troubles, in 1816 George and his wife Caroline were having a serious quarrel.

There are few letters from George to his mother. He was a busy lawyer who still kept up his interest in the stage, and Frederick quoted :

"The rage for acting is so strong among the Liverpool attorneys that they all correspond with him about Drury Lane, and that this had got him more briefs at Liverpool than anything else. He has more than cleared his expenses, and is in high force and spirits."

George's wife, much to his annoyance, had gone



abroad with her mother, Elizabeth Duchess of Devonshire, and rumour said that Henry Brougham, later Lord Chancellor of England and the defender of Queen Caroline when her trial took place in 1820, was seen too much and too often with her. There appeared so much reason to believe that this was true that Lady Melbourne with her usual directness wrote to Mrs. George Lamb, who replied from Geneva. She admitted the friendship with Brougham, but said much what Lady Caroline said when taxed in the same way, that she did not think her husband cared for her.

*From Mrs. George Lamb to Viscountess Melbourne*

MY DEAR LADY MELBOURNE,

Since you have spoken to me openly, I will do so too. I suppose everybody makes some excuse to themselves for their conduct, and I perhaps have no better one than many others, but I will at least try to explain if not excuse what must seem to you quite inexcusable. I have for many years thought myself slighted and not loved. Some people may make up their minds to this, and turn their thoughts to other things, & make new interests to themselves, but I could not. I am therefore peculiarly alive to any warmth of affection and attachment from others. I detest deceit and concealment, and believed I could be happier living out of the world even with loss of reputation with those who loved me, than in it, struggling to appear happy with those who did not care for me. I have struggled seven years, and my courage at last failed me. I

was told George appeared unhappy at my absence and wrote to him to ask if he was so, and this was his answer—"Who the deuce says I am unhappy? If I am it is only at some theatrical worry. I do not like your absence certainly—it fidgets me and unsettles me, and I get through less business in consequence." This was not the language of a person who loved or regretted me, but I suppose he was perfectly unconscious of what was passing in my mind. I have now received one which has made me, (it is no exaggeration to say), miserable—because it shows him to be so—and no plan of life could be tolerable to me, that involved him in misery. I wait therefore for one letter more, and I will do whatever he requires. I will either return to England, or he shall join me here, but if I make the sacrifice I must be satisfied that it is for his happiness I make it, and not to avoid the tittle tattle of the world. One word I must say on Mr. B[rougham]'s account. You fancy he has estranged me from you all—I swear to you most solemnly that he never had such a wish or intention. He felt it awkward to be much with you, and so did I, and what perhaps added to the coldness of my manner just at the time was the difference of our opinions about Lady Byron. Since we have been here I have scarcely seen him; some remarks were made which annoyed Clifford & I prevailed upon him to go away, or at least not to see me. The being detained here has been very uncomfortable to us all, but Mrs. C.<sup>1</sup> has been taken ill, and we are very uncertain when we can move. The Duchess is waiting for us at Florence. If George is ill I will set out from hence & return home directly.

<sup>1</sup> The Hon. Mrs. Cowper, sister-in-law of Lord Cowper.

She did return to her husband, but not for some time after. It is impossible not to feel that a great deal of blame must have been attached to the Lambs as husbands.

In April 1816 William Lamb was returned for Peterborough, and at the close of the Session Canning joined the Tory Government, and was made President of the Board of Control. Lady Melbourne did not like Canning. Long before she had written to Lord Byron :

“Canning is not pleasant in my eyes—his countenance is false & he always looks suspicious, & a sort of imitation of Sheridan's, but so inferior, that with me it loses all its effect.”

She and Frederick were both displeased with William. He had been one of a secret committee appointed to inquire into the truth of reports on the revolutionary feeling in the country owing to the suffering of the people caused by bad harvests and unemployment. The committee recommended the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, and William voted against his party on this occasion.

But a still sorer trial came on Lady Melbourne. In September 1816 Lord and Lady Cowper decided to go abroad, and took their two elder children with them. The journey lasted from the beginning of September 1816 until late in June 1817. Lady Melbourne was ageing, and the anxiety about her health, which was always

present, made her feel the parting deeply. Lady Cowper wrote :

“ If you and Papa were but with us I should be quite happy. I am very sorry to see by your letter that you seem melancholy, but I trust this will wear off ; a few months are soon passed & you need be under no uneasiness about us, for I assure you I am prudent to a degree you have no idea of about myself as well as the Children. The dangers of travelling are so exaggerated it is an optical delusion like that mentioned by some travellers in the deserts which makes things at a distance appear twice the size they really are.”

Their younger children William and Spencer were left at Brocket, and this no doubt was an anxiety, as the head nurse Hawk was left with them. “ Hawk is too tiresome with her castor oil and her obstinacy,” wrote Lady Cowper to her mother. They visited Paris, Florence, Rome, Munich and Geneva. The children were always well, and Minny much admired. The letters are seldom interesting, except when Lady Cowper was excited at meeting a lady who said, “ Connaissiez-vous cette Madame Lamb ? Elle a fait un livre horrible ” ; and later heard that *Glenarvon* had been burned publicly at Lichfield. To her great pleasure they met Lord and Lady Jersey, who was Sarah Fane, daughter of Lady Westmorland before her marriage :

“ We met Ld. & Ly. Jersey at Geneva & they are now in this Hotel with us, which is very comfort-

able as they are so amiable & it is so very useful to have another Woman as it makes one so independant. The only fear you had was that she would lead me into danger but this I promise you she shall not."

When they got to Florence the Cowpers found that :

"Ld. & Ly. Jersey have been detained here in expectation of seeing Ld. Ponsonby. They set off Monday so will be just before us. I assure you she is quite steady & don't lead me into any kind of danger, on the contrary has contributed very much to my comfort, for it prevents one's feeling lost in a foreign Country to have one person upon whom one can depend."

From Rome she wrote :

"The Society here is very agreeable. We have had rather a bone of Contention here, in P[rince]ss Pauline Borghese<sup>1</sup> whom people chose to be fanciful about because she is Buonaparte's Sister—the same people who were at her feet a year ago. Her Husband the Prince Borghese is the first family in Rome—but Ly. Westd. chose not to visit her saying it was rude to Blacas<sup>2</sup> the French Ambassador who in fact did not care a straw about it, but Ly. Westd. makes a monstrous fuss about everything and manages to make herself very ridiculous & wanted everybody to do just as she chose & because they would not was very angry. The end of this opposition was

<sup>1</sup> Born 1780, married Prince Borghese (1775–1832) in 1803, died at Florence June 9, 1825.

<sup>2</sup> Le Duc de Blacas (1770–1839), a favourite of Louis XVIII.



that we have all been to see her. She and the Dss. of Devonshire stay away but Caroline George I think has been to her. The making any rout about visiting her as Pss. Borghese is ridiculous but you may as well not mention this in England as if they hear of it they will probably think us in the wrong for going to see her. She is beautiful and quite charming, gives herself no airs & only makes the agreeable which is not the case in general with Italian Ladies who seem for the most part very ignorant & dull & thinking of nothing but gambling which they do almost all night."

She also visited Frederick at Munich, and he accompanied her to Spa.

Lady Cowper had no love for her sisters-in-law, the wives of William and George. As the peace of the family did not depend on her, as it did on Lady Melbourne, she was not called upon to exercise the same forbearance with them.

In her letters she spoke but little of her eldest son Fordwich, but her daughter Minny was evidently the delight of her life, though, according to Lady Bessborough, she was a tiresome child, who ruled the house to its detriment. It is amusing to contrast these animadversions with Lady Cowper's glee on returning to Minny, whose natural manners she said she so far preferred to the "pretty behaviour" of Susan Leveson Gower.<sup>1</sup> Throughout her life, Minny, afterwards Lady Shaftesbury, was perfection in her mother's eyes. When Fanny, Lady Cowper's second

<sup>1</sup> Daughter of Lord and Lady Granville.

daughter, who was born a year after Lady Melbourne's death, came out in 1836, she learnt that Lord Granville had uttered the heresy that she was more beautiful than her elder sister Minny, and could hardly believe it because Minny had always been supposed to be unique.

But from the moment Lady Cowper married, she took her place in what Hayward <sup>1</sup> calls "the brilliant galaxy of beautiful women who formed the chief ornament of the British Court during successive reigns till they were gradually replaced, not outshone, by a younger, not fairer or more fascinating race." Her life was the ordinary life of the world of that day. A favourite guest of the Prince Regent, she was often at Brighton. She bore five children, and in her frequent letters to her brother Frederick was fond of tracing likenesses in them to members of her own family, when she described the babies soon after their birth. Lady Cowper's younger daughter Fanny used to talk of her lonely childhood, for Minny always remained her mother's chief preoccupation. Fanny, like the rest, was confided to the charge of Mrs. Hawk, whom the children called "Hawkey" and who ruled the nursery with a rod of iron. Was a child naughty? "No child is naughty if it is well," said "Hawkey": "bring me the Jalap pot," and plunging her thumb into the nauseous mixture she held it out for the child to suck. More than cherishing was given by the

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Hayward, essayist, *Lady Palmerston*.

nurses of those days. They tried to form the characters of those under their care. Hawkey encouraged the sterner virtues. When she was operated on for cataract, she desired that the young Fanny Cowper should be present at the operation—"to teach her courage," she said. Those who saw the courage with which the child, grown to womanhood, met the overwhelming sorrows of her later life will admit that the stern discipline had its merits.

Fanny often talked of the unkind governess who later made her so unhappy. "I wonder I did not tell Minny," she said: "Miss Tomkinson was so unkind that I once gave her a catseye ring I had to propitiate her." Miss Tomkinson was like a governess in a book. When she wished to tell her pupil to shut the piano, she said, "Fanny, close the instrument"; and when she wished her to ring the bell she said, "Fanny, agitate the communicator."

As Lady Cowper grew older, she seems to have silenced the jealous tongues of other women by her charm and *savoir-faire*, though certain people, such as Sybella, Lady Lyttleton, always spoke slightly of her worldliness. It was not strange that she loved the world, for she had lived in it from her youth up, and her talent of discrimination, her instinctive quick judgment of character and her charm and attraction made it a pleasant place to her, while in the kindness of her heart she tried to make it a pleasant place for others.

Charles Greville wrote of a visit to Panshanger in 1832, and described what he called a constant stream of benevolence flowing from Panshanger to the cottagers and almshouses around. Fanny used to tell how the groom of the chambers would come into her mother's sitting-room in the morning rubbing his hands, and saying, "Seven poor women downstairs, my lady, waiting to be relieved." The charity may not have been discriminating, but it proceeded from her overflowing goodness of heart. As the husband of her granddaughter once said, "Even her faults came from over-kindness. She was too kind to refuse anybody anything." He also marked, as a strange trait in her character, that she never gave a present. Another of Lady Cowper's characteristics was that she was always late. She laughed at herself in a letter to her mother when she told her that she had even managed to be late for the Pope, and Greville says that it was difficult to be unpunctual at Panshanger, for no one was ever in time. Lady Cowper and her daughters went to the village church regularly on Sundays. They always arrived in the middle of the service. It would have been of no use putting the service half an hour later, they would have been equally unpunctual. When Queen Victoria visited Panshanger, she was found waiting in the hall for her drive, because Lady Cowper was not ready.

Her daughters were devoted to her, but they suffered a good deal from her matchmaking pro-



pensities. Their mother was so exceedingly kind to any of the men (and they were many) who wished to marry her daughters, that an ardent lover never knew whether he had been refused or not, and continued to hope. This, according to Lady Granville, was because Lady Cowper, on hearing that the young lady had not been kind, immediately rushed to her writing-table and indited an encouraging letter to the swain, which set matters going again. Minny married Lord Ashley, eldest son of 6th Lord Shaftesbury, in 1830. Sir Frederick Lamb was much averse to the marriage, and told his sister so in no measured terms. Lady Cowper had, after Lady Melbourne's death, taken up the regular exchange of letters with her brother Frederick, which her mother had kept up. She lived in the centre of affairs, and it was useful to him to have her clear judgment on events, for though her letters were confused in style, her opinions were worth having.<sup>1</sup> She also kept watch over her father, who survived his wife eleven years and died in 1829.

No letters from Lady Melbourne can be found after the year 1816. We know from her children's letters that she wrote to them, but the letters have not been found.

Lady Melbourne had been failing for some years; perhaps the brilliant mind was failing too,

<sup>1</sup> These letters and the life of Lady Cowper after her husband's death in 1837 will form the subject of a separate volume.



and what she wrote was better destroyed for safety. Her family difficulties must have told on her health, and she must have much disliked the way they seemed to get beyond her control. Lady Cowper was evidently thankful to get back to her mother, and she was with her through the winter of 1817. In March 1818 it was known that Lady Melbourne was lying very ill at Melbourne House, Whitehall. She was not an old woman, for she was only 66, but she had crowded every hour, and lived her life to the full. What may have been her thoughts as she lay dying? She had grasped the world which lay before her with both hands, she had made it her god, and it had in part repaid her worship. She had been courted, flattered, her beauty celebrated. Her wisdom and tact had made her fit to counsel great men, her discretion led them to share their secrets with her. She had not outlived all her friends—that sorrow of old age had been spared her. She and her circle had perhaps seen power falling into other hands than theirs, but her thoughts must have wandered back to the days of her youth, to those who had gone before her, to the brilliant Georgiana and her affection, to the brutal Francis Duke of Bedford, who had adored her but “whose conduct has upset the habits of all our Circle.” She must have thought of her own great drawing-rooms, crowded with all that was best and gayest in Whig Society, now empty and silent as the grave whither she herself was going.

She had been an ambitious mother, careful and anxious for the future of her children, sparing no pains to ensure worldly advantages for them. She had in part succeeded, but much sorrow had come from what she had compassed. Peniston was dead—perhaps earlier attention might have saved him. Harriet might have been alive had the claims of the world not interfered with the journey abroad, which might have helped her. William, for whose advancement she had strained every nerve, had so far not come up to her expectation. He was indolent and uncertain; perhaps his life was spoiled by the marriage she had so ardently desired for him, and though they were separated she knew that he still loved his wife. Their boy was mentally defective. Frederick did not seem likely to marry. He was abroad, lonely and often depressed—he would miss his mother and her constant letters. George and his wife had settled down in a mutual understanding; he would never be a leader of men, but she had not hoped for that. Emily, for whose marriage she had worked from early days, was highly placed, rich, a personage in her own world, looked to by the Whig Party as one of their great hostesses. Her husband was a man much loved by his contemporaries. Emily was the mother of children, yet she, too, would miss her own mother's guiding hand.

These thoughts may have troubled her, and even in death she was true to her traditions. On

her deathbed she spoke words of warning to each of her children, impressing on them for the last time the precepts and maxims with which she had sought to guide their lives; and in these solemn talks we know that she sought as ever to determine their future.

What of her husband, the handsome spend-thrift and libertine to whom she had been given in her youth? Her relations with him may fitly end this record, which began with the letter of her little child. She had not failed him in her own way. His family had risen through her ability, and he could depend at least on her sympathy and understanding.

*From Lord Melbourne to Lady Melbourne*

*Friday, 5 o'clock.*

I have received your letter & am glad you have avoided strangers coming as we shall be much better alone the little time we shall have to do all we have to do. I was well all yesterday but at night waked every hour till six o'clock, but not uncomfortable, or Ill, & in little perspiration. It is therefore better not to go to Panshanger for one Night, as Giles must be put off till Winter. If I want it will see Farqher tomorrow, & if He orders another Dose will take it Sunday night at Brocket & meet you at dinner that day there. Am glad you have done so well. Tell Emily & Ld. C. how sorry I am to have been detained here, but if I had been away from Farqher should have thought myself very bad & should certainly have had a fever. I have found that no Clear Wine

in the day, only one Tablespoonfull of Wine in much Water is the pleasantest drink, & Pint of Claret, only one Glass of Sheer (? Sherry) Wine at supper.

I should if it suits be glad to see Emily & the Dear Child at B. H. on Monday, but settle this as you think may best suit & order all things at B. H. as they hear nothing from me, & you cannot write tomorrow. Hyne will have the Child's Spade, Basket & Broom & I will order F. Goods to send it to him. I am going to Ride & my nerves are not bad, to Ride Fordham without a Groom, as I have no other horse.

I have spoke as yet to no Gentleman since Monday but Sr. Walter & C. Wyndham. As I now go out I am not so dull tho' as your Company would have been a good Comfort, I want you to Lay in a stock of Country Health.

Love to all.

Yrs. Dear Ly. M.

Ever Affectly.

M.

Lady Melbourne died at Melbourne House, Whitehall, on April 6, 1818.

Long years after, when the son she so adored was fading away in a dreary retirement after a life of power and influence such as even her ambitious hopes could hardly have realized, he would sit day after day in front of his mother's picture in the great drawing-room at Bocket, murmuring to himself his estimate of her character, with the affection of a son and the judgment of a man of the world.

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